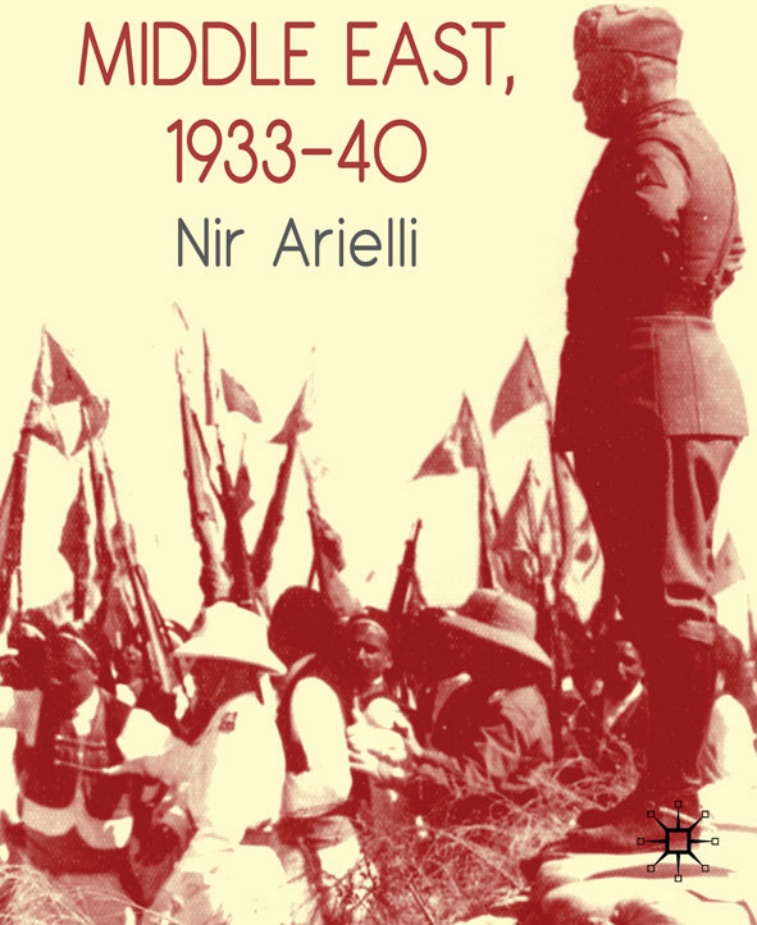
FASCIST ITALY AND THE MIDDLE EAST, 1933–40

Nir Arielli



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Nir Arielli

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To my parents

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List of Abbreviations

ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato
AEO	Agence d'Egypte et d'Orient
AP	Affari Politici
ASMAE	Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affair Esteri
AUSAM	Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dell'Aeronautica Militare
AUSSME	Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito
BDFA	British Documents on Foreign Affairs
CO	Colonial Office [Great Britain]
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
DDF	Documents Diplomatiques Français
DDI	Documneti Diplomatici Italiani
DGFP	Documents on German Foreign Policy
DGSP	Direzione Generale dei Servizi della Propaganda
FO	Foreign Office [Great Britain]
GAL	Gioventù Araba del Littorio
HNA	Hungarian National Archives
IOR	India Office Records
IPO	Istituto per l'Oriente
OO	Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini
SANE	Società Anonima di Navigazione Eritrea
SIM	Servizio Informazioni Militari
TNA	The National Archives [London]

Note on Transliteration

Arab names appear without diacritical symbols. The prefix 'al-' in individual names is used only when the full name of a person is mentioned. Common geographical names that are familiar to the non-Arab public are given in their Latinized version.

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Introduction

Standing in front of a mosque in Derna (Darnah) in eastern Libya, the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and his entourage were received by the local *qadi*. In a ceremony most probably directed by Libya's flamboyant Governor General, Marshal Italo Balbo, the *qadi* pleased his visitors by announcing: 'Great Duce … we promise you that the four hundred million Muslims of the entire world will not remain indifferent to the particular attention you have displayed towards Islam and that their gratitude will find a way of giving tangible proof.' Mussolini's visit to Libya in March 1937 encapsulated not only the ambitions but also the contradictions and ambiguities of Fascist Italy's policy vis-à-vis the Arab world. It symbolized the supposed benefits brought by the Fascist regime to the colony's indigenous population but also saw the Duce giving his blessing to an agricultural colony established for settlers from the Italian mainland. The visit provided Mussolini with an opportunity to attempt to upgrade his influence in the Middle East and beyond by declaring that Italy's sympathy went out to the Muslims of the whole world, and at the same time to assure Italy's imperial rival – Great Britain – that, from a colonial point of view, Italy was satisfied after the conquest of Ethiopia.[1]

Fascist Italy's complex foreign policy has given rise to different and often conflicting interpretations. Contemporary research is divided when analyzing Italian policy towards the countries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean during the 1930s. Renzo De Felice and a group of Italian historians who draw on his work contend that Italy pursued an opportunistic 'instrumental' policy that sought to utilize local forces such as Arab nationalism to exert pressure on Britain and France, forcing them to make concessions towards Rome. According to this view, the Arabs were used as pawns in Italy's 'Mediterranean game', serving as a

form of deterrence and a tool, ultimately to be sacrificed on the altar of a general agreement which the Duce sought to reach with London.[2] Luigi Goglia argues that Mussolini and Fascism did not have an Arab policy with a clearly shaped strategy or aims of its own. Rather it was an instrument adopted and wielded by the Duce to strike against, to irritate, to create diversions for and to put pressure on Britain. Nicola Labanca has also dismissed Mussolini's pro-Arab policy as mere rhetoric aimed at the British. Recently Stefano Fabei has argued that, despite Fascist 'politico-cultural penetration' in the Middle East, an 'agreement with England remained the primary objective of Italian foreign policy'.[3] Finally, Rosaria Quartararo has suggested that, although Mussolini sought to increase his influence and perhaps even his domination over parts of the Middle East and the Red Sea, in Europe he was hoping to reach an understanding with London. Indeed, if it were not for the obstinate refusal of Britain and France to meet Italy's demands, Mussolini would not have been pushed into Adolf Hitler's arms and into joining the Second World War.[4]

Most British and North American historians have a different interpretation of Fascist aspirations in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. They emphasize the importance of two intertwined factors: an expansionist programme and an underlying ideology. In his influential *Mussolini Unleashed*, MacGregor Knox argues that Italian policy was motivated by a desire for imperialistic expansion. According to this approach, 'Mussolini had a genuine foreign policy program: the creation of an Italian *spazio vitale* in the Mediterranean and Middle East.'[5] This view is supported by Robert Mallett who believes that a 'predetermined imperial programme did form a central component of Mussolini's fascist ideology' and that for the Duce, the 'mission' of Italian policy was to 'win control of the Mediterranean exists.'[6] Reynolds Mathewson Salerno is more specific: Mussolini aimed to create an empire 'stretching from East Africa and the Middle East, up the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal and into the Balkans, across North Africa and the western Mediterranean.'[7] Similarly Bruce Strang notes that, since the inception of the Fascist movement, Mussolini thought that 'Italy would have to expand "economically and spiritually"' in order to 'secure its right to dominate the Mediterranean and to seize its place in the world.' Strang stresses that 'Mussolini repeatedly made it clear that Italy would have to confront the plutodemocratic powers of Britain and France to accomplish this vital goal.'[8] Finally, for John Pollard 'The whole thrust of Fascist foreign policy was determined by an ideology, deriving from pre-war Nationalism, which was constructed around strong elements of imperialism and *romanità* – the myth of Rome – and social Darwinism.'[9]

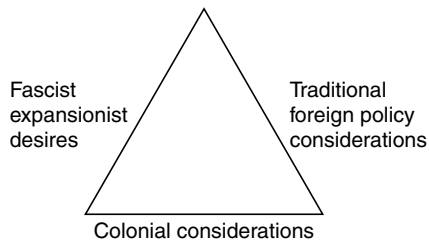
When discussing the methods by which Mussolini hoped to attain his ambitious aims, Knox and Mallett emphasize Italian military planning, increased spending on armaments and naval construction. They also stress the strategic importance of the Duce's alliance with Hitler as a means of securing Italy's back and providing it with a powerful revisionist ally.[10] Salerno focuses on how Mussolini consistently sought to deceive Britain and France diplomatically, while Manuela Williams alludes to the use of other methods: 'In the 1930s, Italy's policy of expansion on the opposite shore of the Mediterranean and in the Middle East was centred upon the development of a preferential partnership with Arab governments and nationalist movements, which would eventually replace the political and economic links created by the British empire.'[11] In summary then, where the Italian or De Felicean school sees Fascist policy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East as being an opportunistic instrument in Mussolini's power-politics vis-à-vis Britain and France, the Anglo-North American school focuses on the Duce's preconceived ideological drive for imperialist expansion.[12] The debate seems to reflect not only diverging views regarding Italian foreign policy, but also a disagreement on the nature of Fascism – undoubtedly an ambiguous and multifaceted historical phenomenon.

This book offers an interpretation of Fascist Italy's Middle Eastern policy which is neither apologetic nor teleological. It argues that Mussolini's Italy aspired to become the hegemonic power in the Middle East, but that the means of achieving this goal varied as a result of shifting priorities and changes in international circumstances. Rather than explaining Italy's policy in the Middle East exclusively through expansionist or traditional foreign policy discourses, this study examines the intricate relations between the different ideological, political, strategic and religious interests that guided the Fascist regime's dealings with this region.

The focus of this study is on the impact of three central and at times conflicting forces which shaped Italy's policy in the Middle East. These were: the ambitions and goals commonly linked to Fascist/Nationalist ideology (expansionism, vitality, the need for colonial outlets and the desire for a self-sufficient, autarkic empire); traditional foreign policy considerations vis-à-vis the other European Great Powers with special emphasis on Britain and France; and the desire to prevent dissent in and to encourage the development of Italy's colonies in Africa which bordered the Middle East. While the first two have received considerable attention, one of the main contributions of this study is the emphasis it

places on the importance of colonial considerations for understanding the Fascist regime's policy towards the countries of the Middle East.

In peacetime, each one of these aspirations exercised a pull on policy, but none was strong enough completely to override the forces exerted by the other two. Italian policy towards the Middle East can thus be envisaged as having been confined within a triangle:



Forces that shaped Italian policy in the Middle East

At different points in time policy could shift closer to one side and then to another, it could lean towards either pragmatic or ideological considerations, but it could not go beyond certain limits. An exploration of the dynamics of the inter-relationship between these forces provides for a better understanding of Fascist policy in the region. This triangle was broken only when Italy entered the Second World War, as traditional foreign policy considerations lost their importance and considerations pertaining to the colonial population became secondary. At this point the central force driving Italian policy was the desire for territorial expansion through military conquest and victory that would pave the way for even greater acquisitions at the peace table.

To what extent did other factors, namely domestic and economic considerations, affect Italian decision-making? In the Fascist period foreign policy in the Middle East was rarely influenced by domestic considerations. It was essentially a top-down policy, steered primarily by Mussolini along with top officials at the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry for the Colonies (later renamed the Ministry for Italian Africa) and the Press and Propaganda Ministry (later renamed the Ministry of Popular Culture). Beyond the first circle of decision makers, it involved Italy's diplomatic representatives, officers in the Italian armed forces, orientalists, journalists, businessmen and, to a lesser extent, clergymen. Colonial governors exercised considerable influence on Italy's Middle Eastern policy throughout the 1920s and during the early 1930s, but in later years their freedom of manoeuvre was restricted by the Fascist

leadership in Rome. Aspirations for expansion in the Middle East never gained mass popular support. Whereas many Italians supported the conquest of Ethiopia, even if only to avenge the defeat at the Battle of Adowa (1896), the population at large remained indifferent to the regime's attempts to bring the Middle East into the Italian sphere of influence.[13] The evidence presented in the following chapters illustrates that, when it came to formulating policy in the Arab world, the Italian elite was not responding to internal pressures from below. Furthermore, as we shall see, in dealing with this region, economics remained subordinate to politics, despite some Italian firms having financial interests there (particularly in the fields of shipping, banking and insurance), and despite Mussolini's concern with obtaining Middle Eastern oil.[14]

Chapter 1 surveys Italy's dealings with the Middle East from the late nineteenth century until 1934. The chapter describes the evolution of one of the main vehicles of Italian policy in the Middle East and one which was also instrumental in attempts to acquire the support of large sections of Italy's colonial subjects: the policy of friendship and respect towards Islam. It also examines the changing way in which the Italian leadership viewed Zionism. Supported by some officials and strongly opposed by others, Rome's policy towards the Zionist movement underwent substantial changes. Chapter 2 explores Italy's Middle Eastern policy during the tumultuous period of the Abyssinian Crisis and the Ethiopian War. Italy's actions in Africa resulted in a worsening of relations with Britain. Consequently, during 1935 and 1936 Italian policy in the Middle East became overtly anti-British. The chapter underlines the importance the Fascist regime attached to propaganda. Often employed both at home and abroad, propaganda was a mode of action close to the heart of the ex-journalist Mussolini. It served as a tool whose flames could be made to rise and then be dampened down according to the needs of the day. Chapter 3 describes the heyday of Italy's pro-Muslim policy between 1936 and 1938 and analyses the ways in which it was harnessed for the purposes of both colonial and international policy. It also examines Italy's military preparations for a war in the Middle East, which included a new course in strategic planning as well as construction works and fortifications in the naval bases and airfields of Libya and the Dodecanese Islands. Chapter 4 focuses on the political interests and operational dilemmas that guided Italy's overt and covert involvement in the Arab Revolt in Palestine. Like the previous chapters, it underlines the importance of the European context of Italy's policy in the Middle East. The changing international circumstances had a profound impact on what Rome could and could not do. Chapter 5 traces

the decline in Italy's position in the Middle East during 1938 and 1939 under the combined effects of events in Europe, the mass colonization of Libya, the conquest of Albania and Italy's racial legislation. It also examines to what extent the antisemitic policy, which the Fascist government adopted in 1938, was influenced by Italy's policy vis-à-vis the Arab world. Finally, Chapter 6 examines the Fascist regime's grandiose ambitions in the region upon entering the Second World War. It also analyses why these ambitions were not and could not be achieved. In addition to the themes discussed above, the following chapters analyse the reaction of Middle Eastern societies to Italy's policy. Historians of twentieth century Europe tend at times to assign the Middle East the passive role of an object in imperial rivalry. This is an erroneous tenet. As we shall see, any notion of passivity is mistaken. In fact it was often local leaders who initiated contact with Rome.

There is a methodological difficulty in trying to assess what 'the Arabs thought' about Italy. There are no reliable opinion polls from this period that tried to confront this or similar questions. There is also some difficulty in gauging the level of awareness of international affairs within Arab societies which were still primarily rural and had high illiteracy rates. In Egypt, for instance, some 76 per cent of the men and 94 per cent of the women were believed to be illiterate in 1937.[15] Fortunately, questions surrounding Arab responses to Fascism and Nazism have attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years.[16] The picture presented in this book relies on these new findings as well as on attitudes expressed by the Middle Eastern press and on reports compiled by local and foreign observers who operated in the region. This will hopefully provide at least a sample of how Italy was viewed by the politically aware, media-consuming, urban sections of different societies in the Middle East and give an idea as to whether or not Italian attempts to court 'the Arabs' were successful.

Finally, it is necessary to make a geographical clarification. The term Middle East, which is employed throughout this study, refers to the predominantly Arab countries of the region: Egypt, the Palestine Mandate, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. The focus on this region is warranted by the fact that the Italian Foreign Ministry commonly tended to formulate its 'Arab policy' with all or at least some of these countries in mind. Furthermore, the pan-Arab leaders with whom the Italians were in contact tried to persuade Rome to support the union of some or all of these countries. Italian policy vis-à-vis Turkey and Iran was often motivated by different sets of factors than those which were at work when dealing with the Arab Middle East and will therefore not be examined here.

Chronologically our focus will be on the crucial period between Italy's adoption of a pro-Muslim policy in 1933–4 and the series of disasters that beset the Italian government and armed forces in the autumn of 1940. However, as the next chapter will show, Fascist Middle Eastern policy built and expanded upon foundations which were laid down during the Liberal era of Italian history.

1
Continuity and Change: Italy and the Middle East, 1870–1934

> To be strong in order to become great, that is [our] duty: to expand, to conquer experimentally and materially, through emigration, treaties, trade, industry, science, art, religion [and] war. To withdraw from the race is impossible, so we must triumph. The future belongs to those who do not fear it.
>
> (Alfredo Oriani, 1908)[1]

Liberal Italy's interests in the Middle East

Italian colonial expansion began shortly after the country's unification in 1861. From the very start, the overseas possessions that Italy managed to acquire were positioned on the edges of the Middle East. During the 1870s and 1880s the Italians were able to establish themselves on the southern end of the western shores of the Red Sea, a process facilitated by British acquiescence and at times even their support. In 1885 Italy's Foreign Minister, Pasquale Mancini, justified the necessity of this remote colony, which came to be known as Eritrea, by arguing that the Red Sea provided the key to the Mediterranean.[2]

In the Mediterranean itself Italian expansion was much slower to develop. In 1880 the prominent Italian statesman Francesco Crispi told the Chamber of Deputies that modern Italy must learn from the history of ancient Rome and the medieval city-states and assert itself in the Mediterranean.[3] Italian politicians coveted Tunisia but in 1881 their ambitions were frustrated by the French who occupied that country and established a protectorate over it. Soon afterwards Egypt fell into the hands of another Great Power. In the late 1870s and early 1880s Italy sought to partake in the international management of Egypt.

Of all the European communities in this country the Italian was second in size only to the Greek. In July 1882, when the Urabi Revolt threatened European interests in Egypt, Britain invited Italy to participate in its intervention there. Mancini, however, refused, fearing the costs of the enterprise, the military difficulties it entailed, as well as German and French reactions. The paper *Popolo Romano* called on the Italian government not to exceed in shyness and to intervene. A little of the African sun, they argued, would do no harm to Italy's soldiers. After the British succeeded in overcoming Egyptian resistance with ease, Italian opposition leaders such as Crispi and Sidney Sonnino lamented the loss of a colonial opportunity.[4]

Expansionist ideas suffered a setback following Italy's defeat by the Abyssinians at Adowa in 1896. Nonetheless, during the first decade of the twentieth century the idea of colonial expansion began to gain ground in certain sectors of Italian society. In 1906 the *Istituto Coloniale Italiano* in Rome was established along with the journal *Rivista Coloniale* which disseminated patriotic 'colonial culture'. The *Associazione Nazionale Italiana* held its first congress in Florence in December 1910 and soon began to publish the weekly *L'Idea Nazionale*.[5] Literary figures like Gabriele D'Annunzio, Giovanni Pascoli, Alfredo Oriani and Enrico Corradini promoted expansionism and revived the myth of Italy's glorious Roman and Venetian past. Expansionist-nationalist ideas were flourishing among the younger cadres of the Foreign Ministry and the term *mare nostrum* (our sea), as a way to describe the Mediterranean, was put into use before the First World War.[6]

As Christopher Seton-Watson has pointed out, Italian imperialism was largely imitative. The 'industrial imperialism' of northern Italy's traders, bankers and manufacturers took the form of a search for markets, natural resources and investment opportunities, while the 'demographic imperialism' of southern politicians, publicists and peasants took the form of a search for land where Italy's surplus population could be settled in prosperity while still remaining under the Italian flag.[7] Eventually, both economic and demographic justifications for imperialism proved unfounded. Italian industrialists and bankers did have commercial interests, for instance, in the Ottoman Empire, but it was often the government in Rome that had to encourage them to take steps that would be useful to the ambitions of Italian foreign policy. In the Italian case capital usually followed the flag, not the other way around. Even under Fascism, Italy's economy gained more from tourism than it did from speculation in the Middle East. Furthermore, Italian capitalism showed little inclination to invest in the colonies without

government subsidies or guarantees. The colonies were a constant strain on the national budget and none of them paid their own way. As far as Italian emigrants were concerned, the USA and even French Tunisia remained far more appealing destinations than Eritrea, Somalia and, later on, Libya.[8]

However, an expansionist policy and the pursuit of colonies enabled Italy to maintain its posture as a Great Power. Moreover, foreign policy provided *foci* for patriotic unity, enabling a rare collaboration between the lay Italian state and Catholic sectors close to the Vatican. Religious organizations such as the Salesian order and financial institutions with connections to the Papacy such as the *Banco di Roma* were harnessed to enhance the prestige of Italian culture and further the country's commercial interests on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean.[9] As the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann noted some years later, 'in Palestine the Vatican and the secular Italian Government seem to be identical. The cleavage which exists in Rome is not apparent in Jerusalem'.[10] Step by step nationalist politicians, diplomats, Italian clergymen and businessmen of the Liberal era laid the foundations that later served the Fascist regime's Middle Eastern policy.

In 1911 favourable international conditions as well as nationalist sentiments in the Chamber of Deputies and in the press combined to persuade the Prime Minister, Giovanni Giolitti, and his Foreign Minister, Antonio di San Giuliano, to seize a Mediterranean colony for Italy and perhaps help assert the country's claim to be a Great Power. The invasion of the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was launched in late September 1911. The Italians miscalculated the resistance they would encounter and expected a quick victory. Much to their surprise, the local Arab and Berber population joined the Ottoman forces in resisting the invasion, pinning the Italians to their positions near the coast. In January 1912 Sayyid Ahmad al-Sharif, the leader of the *Sanusiyya*, a religious Islamic order that was founded in the nineteenth century and had a strong following in Cyrenaica, proclaimed a *jihad* against the invaders. In order to break the deadlock and to exert more pressure on the Ottomans, the Italians resorted to capturing the Dodecanese Islands in the Aegean in April 1912, to employing their navy in the Dardanelles, and to bombarding Beirut in Lebanon and the port of Hodeidah in the Red Sea. The Italian government also began to send money and arms to support the revolt of Sayyid Muhammad Ibn Ali al-Idrisi against the Ottomans in Asir in the Arabian Peninsula. The military and diplomatic impasse was only solved when the outbreak of the First Balkan War in October 1912 forced the Ottomans to capitulate.[11]

In addition to acquiring Libya, the Italians gained temporary custody of the Dodecanese which, after the First World War, became permanent. Though the Libyan War had been more successful than the disastrous campaign in Ethiopia 16 years earlier, it re-asserted the pattern that was to continue through to the Fascist period, whereby colonial expansion was ruinously expensive and rife with setbacks.[12]

In 1912–14 Italy began to seek commercial concessions from the Turks in Asia Minor, especially in the region of Adalia (now known as Anatolia). However, these plans were thwarted by the outbreak of the First World War. Another sphere where Italy sought to assert its influence was on the eastern shores of the Red Sea, in close proximity to the colony in Eritrea. Italian attempts at commercial penetration in south-western Arabia began as early as 1910.[13] Rome's ambitions in the region sparked a Red Sea rivalry with Britain which would last, with varying degrees of intensity, for three decades.

With the outbreak of the First World War in Europe new horizons were opened for Italian colonial expansion. In November 1914 the Ministry for the Colonies, which was established at the end of the Libyan War, charted out Italy's colonial aspirations. In North Africa Italy sought, among other things, a British concession of the Jarabub Oasis on the Egyptian-Libyan frontier. In the Arabian Peninsula Italy wanted a position of parity with Britain: either a joint guarantee of Arab independence or – if Britain were to establish itself in Arabia – the Italians ought to be allowed to acquire a similar position in Asir and parts of Yemen. An article which appeared in *Rivista Coloniale* in January 1915, and was probably inspired by the Ministry for the Colonies, called for the conquest of Hodeidah, Mokha and Sheikh Said on the eastern shores of the Red Sea in order to prevent the region from falling to another power.[14]

Middle Eastern ambitions played a part in the Italian decision to enter the First World War. In February 1915 the British and French fleets bombarded the Dardanelles. The Italian Prime Minister, Antonio Salandra, and his Foreign Minister, Sidney Sonnino, feared that if Italy did not join the war soon it would arrive too late to take part in the defeat and partition of Turkey.[15] Despite their former membership in the Triple Alliance, the Italian government approached the British, in early March 1915, with a list of conditions for Italian entry into the war on the side of the Allies. Some of the recommendations of the Ministry for the Colonies were included in Italy's colonial demands: equitable treatment in the Mediterranean; a mutual Anglo-Italian guarantee for the independence of Yemen and the Muslim holy places as well as an undertaking not to annex any part of the Arabian Peninsula; and

an extension of Italy's colonies in Eritrea, Somalia and Libya through concessions from the colonies of Britain and France. However, Italy was hardly in a strong position to bargain over colonies, having during the winter of 1914–15 lost control of all Libya except for some positions near the Mediterranean coast.[16]

The Treaty of London, which was signed on 26 April 1915 and would soon bring Italy into the war, gave a vague assurance that Italy 'ought to obtain a just share of the Mediterranean region adjacent to the province of Adalia'. Article 13 of the treaty stipulated 'in principle that Italy may claim some equitable compensation' in Africa should France and Britain increase their colonial territories at the expense of Germany. Italy did not obtain the mutual Anglo-Italian guarantee it sought for the Arabian Peninsula. Instead Rome adhered to an existing pact between the allies, according to which the Muslim holy places in Arabia would remain under the authority of an independent Muslim power.[17] The promises Italy was given in the Treaty of London were never fully fulfilled and for many years this failing was used by Italian statesmen to justify their colonial claims.

Despite Italy's declaration of war on Turkey in August 1915, the Sykes-Picot agreement, which partitioned the Middle East into British and French spheres of influence, was concluded in early 1916 without Italy's knowledge. The agreement made no mention of Italy. Furthermore, in Article 10 of Sykes-Picot, the French and British agreed that no power would be allowed to acquire territory in the Arabian Peninsula or to build naval bases on the Red Sea islands, a clause that could be interpreted as anti-Italian. Indeed, the British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey and other senior Whitehall officials believed even before the war that 'it is of great importance not to allow Italy to obtain a foothold on the Eastern coast of the Red Sea or the adjacent Islands.'[18]

When Sonnino learnt of the existence of the Sykes-Picot Agreement he was alarmed. The text was finally disclosed to the Italians in October 1916, only after Sonnino – a staunch supporter of Italy's participation in the war – threatened to resign. In the following months Italian wartime diplomacy sought to modify the terms of the Anglo-French agreement, adjusting them to Italy's aspirations. Sonnino's policy was epitomized by the slogan '*O tutti o nessuno*' – either everybody gets a piece of the Ottoman Empire or nobody does. Finally, the St Jean de Maurienne Agreement of April 1917, which was later embodied in an exchange of letters on 18 August 1917, saw the Allies recognize Italy's sphere of influence in Asia Minor (which was to include Adalia, Smyrna and Konia). Sonnino was also able to further Italian aspirations in the Holy Land. According to

Sykes-Picot, Palestine west of the Jordan River and exclusive of Haifa and Acre was designated to be administered internationally. In 1917 the Allies recognized Italy's claim to participate in the country's administration. On the other hand, an Italian claim for the Farsan Islands in the Red Sea was not recognized. The agreement seemed to improve Italy's cards for the post-war peace settlement. However, it was dependent upon Russian ratification and as this was never given, Britain was able to renounce the obligations it had undertaken at St Jean de Maurienne once the war was over.[19]

Sonnino attempted to bolster Italy's tenuous diplomatic position in various ways. In view of the fact that many of Italy's subjects in Libya and East Africa were Muslims, he argued that, as a 'Muslim Power', Italy should be informed of any agreements made with the Sharif of Mecca. As the resistance to Italian rule in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had a distinct Islamic flavour, Rome sought the friendship of the rulers of the Muslim holy places in Arabia. Sonnino repeatedly offered to send Muslim Italian colonial troops to join the Hijaz expedition but was continually turned down by the British.[20]

The Foreign Minister was partially more successful when it came to ensuring Italian participation in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. In early March 1917 he learnt that the French were planning to send troops to take part in the conquest of Palestine. The Italians had a vested interest in the Catholic institutions which operated in the Holy Land and Sonnino was eager to participate in the country's post-war international administration. Seeking not to be outdone by the French he offered the British government to send 5,000 troops. On 9 April 1917 the British reluctantly agreed that a small Italian detachment of 'some three hundred men' could join the expeditionary force 'for representative purposes only'. Despite the opposition of Italy's obstinate Chief of Staff, a small Italian detachment left for Port Said in May 1917 and eventually took part in the Allied offensive against the Turks at the Third Battle of Gaza. In the summer of 1918, when General Allenby was prepared to accept a more substantial Italian contingent, Sonnino tried to persuade his government to increase Italy's participation in the war effort in the Middle East. He argued that such a move would strengthen Italy's claim to receive territory in Asia Minor. However, he was unable to persuade Italy's generals or the Minister for the Colonies to deliver the troops he requested. In September 1918 Allenby advanced on northern Palestine and Syria without making use of Italian forces.[21]

Italy's poor military performance on the one hand and Wilsonian ideals of self determination and adjusting state frontiers according to lines of

nationality on the other, did not create an atmosphere favourable to the furtherance of Italian colonial claims once the war was over. At the peace conference Italy fared badly. The Italians' request to receive the Farsan Islands in the Red Sea as part of their colonial compensation was turned down by the British Colonial Minister, Lord Alfred Milner.[22] The landing of Italian troops in Adalia and Smyrna in spring 1919 aggravated the already tense relations between the Italian delegation to Paris and the Allied leaders David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson. Eventually, the Italians had to abandon the hope of acquiring territories in Asia Minor. Italy's post-war Prime Minister, Francesco Nitti, believed that colonial adventures in the Middle East at this stage 'would have involved Italy in undoubted economic ruin and in the certainty of military adventures of incalculable difficulty, which would have absorbed all the resources of the country at the very time when Italy had most need of them.'[23] Following the rise of Mustafa Kemal's nationalists, the Italians withdrew their forces from Asia Minor and opted to establish friendly relations with the new regime in Turkey.[24]

In addition to Italy's military, diplomatic and financial weakness, the war and its aftermath illustrated that the country lacked a specific human resource, which had proven so instrumental in establishing Britain's position in the Middle East: former archaeologists and surveyors who spoke Arabic and were familiar with Middle Eastern customs and terrain. The Italians had no Herbert Kitchener, T. E. Lawrence, Gertrude Bell or St John Philby. As one historian has pointed out, 'to produce such men [and women] requires centuries of Oriental engagement'.[25] Italy was a newcomer to the field of colonial powers in the Muslim world. It had much to learn in order to compete with the other members of this club.

The attempts to further Italian penetration in post-war Palestine, where different contingencies were pursued at the same time, provide a microcosm for Italy's Middle Eastern policy in the late Liberal and early Fascist periods. For decades Italy had been trying to establish a foothold in Palestine through Catholic institutions and Italian clergymen. By doing so Italy was in fact undermining France's traditional position as the protector of the Christian holy places. Major Francesco D'Agostino, the commander of the Italian detachment in Palestine, sought to counterbalance the French by insisting on Italy's rights in the Catholic churches of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. This inevitably led to friction with François Georges-Picot, the French civil representative in Palestine.[26] In April 1919 Carlo Sforza, the Italian High Commissioner in Constantinople, persuaded the Sultan and Caliph, Mehmed VI, to give his consent to the preparation of an *iradé* (decree), by means of

which the *Cenacolo* (the site on Mount Zion in Jerusalem where the Last Supper is believed to have taken place) was ceded to the King of Italy.[27] The Savoy dynasty claimed the *Cenacolo* as the descendents of Robert d'Anjou, King of Naples, who had bought the grounds in the fourteenth century. In fact, King Vittorio Emanuele III took a personal interest in obtaining the *Cenacolo*. However, the British government informed the Italians that all outstanding questions regarding the holy places would be settled by a special international committee. Such a committee was never convened and therefore Italian representatives in Palestine continued to press for possession of the *Cenacolo* until 1940.[28]

Another card Rome tried to play in order to gain a foothold in Palestine was through supporting Zionism. In February 1918 Gaetano Manzoni, the Director General of political affairs at the Foreign Ministry, began drafting internal memoranda about the advisability of using Italian Jews, who would participate in the Zionist movement, to promote Italian interests in Palestine and to counterbalance British influence. Sonnino endorsed the idea and agreed to send Comandante Angelo Levi-Bianchini, a young Jewish naval officer, and Dr Giacomo Artom, a Jewish military physician, to Palestine to collaborate with Chaim Weizmann's Zionist delegation. The purposes of the mission included studying the commercial, industrial, agricultural and mineral resources of the land, and the opportunities these offered for Italian economic activities. Another objective was to draft proposals for the establishment of permanent Italian cultural and charitable organizations in Palestine.[29]

At the same time the Marquis di Soragna, an aristocrat with traditional Catholic sympathies who served as the Italian Military Attaché to General Allenby's staff, attempted to rally local anti-Zionist feelings, believing that this would increase Italy's popularity among the local population and further the internationalization of Palestine. In June 1919 the new Italian Consul General in Jerusalem, Alberto Tuozzi, began to advocate a policy that would encourage Palestine's 'natural tendency' towards Islam and nationalism. To further complicate matters, Italy had often assumed the role of 'protecting power' over the Sephardic Jews in the eastern Mediterranean. In June 1919, shortly before leaving the Foreign Ministry, Sonnino authorized the sending of a ship under the command of Levi-Bianchini on a 'political-commercial cruise' in the eastern Mediterranean to establish commercial and cultural ties with Sephardic Jews in the seaport towns of Egypt, Syria, Greece, Turkey and Palestine. The ultimate aim of this project was to form a Mediterranean Sephardic Union loyal to Rome that would counterbalance the supposedly pro-British

Zionist Ashkenazi Jews.[30] Finally, under Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza (June 1920–July 1921), Italy avoided committing itself to any single orientation and adopted a policy of non-intervention.[31] This mixture of conflicting priorities continued to characterize Italian policy in Palestine in the early years of the Fascist regime.

Young Mussolini, 'the Arabs' and the Middle East

In late October 1922 the National Fascist Party staged the 'March on Rome', forcing the Italian ruling elite into appointing the party's leader, Benito Mussolini, as Prime Minister. Within a number of years the Duce was able to establish a dictatorial regime and consequently his actions have stood at the centre of historiographic debate. Richard Bosworth has pointed out, with good reason, that the study of Fascist Italy's empire and foreign policy 'can scarcely be comprehended by focusing exclusively on the personality and policies of "one man alone"', as Mussolini was not solely responsible for the regime's aggression.[32] Nonetheless, few would question his central role in moulding Italian foreign policy during the Fascist period. Let us therefore examine how he perceived the Middle East and its inhabitants at the early stages of his political career.

Mussolini's approach towards 'the Arabs' exhibited all the traits that today would be labelled, in Saidian terms, as classic orientalism. Indeed, the Duce possessed an ideological misperception, both latent and manifest, of the 'Orient'.[33] On the one hand there was romantic fascination; he was thoroughly impressed by the 'Arabism' of his mistress, Leda Rafanelli, who had spent a few months in Egypt. 'You have given me the illusion of the mysterious and marvellous East, with its violent perfumes, its mad and fascinating dreams', he wrote to her in 1912. 'Let's read Nietzsche and the Koran together.'[34] Years later he boasted that he knew about Arab affairs, having studied the Quran, as well as Muslim history and religion.[35]

On the other hand, Mussolini's attitude was often condescending and at times racist. In 1925 he informed King Vittorio Emanuele that 'The old question of Jarabub is moving to a solution, albeit with Levantine slowness.'[36] When conveying his discontent with General Franco's strategy during the Spanish Civil War, Mussolini commented that 'the Spanish, who are descendents of the Arabs, do not know how to fight a war in its entirety; they lack the essentials and fight individually, as a patrol or at best as a tribe.'[37] The Duce believed that the Italians were superior to the Arabs. He found the spectacle of an Italian taxi driver taking a tip from

an Arab or of a Sicilian polishing the shoes of a North African native, unacceptable. He also believed in the need to prevent sexual relations between Arabs and Europeans in order to avoid the creation of a mixed race.[38] Mussolini's racial anxiety and sense of superiority were, in many respects, a product of his time. He tended to generalize about 'the Arabs', viewing them as a homogenous entity, a tendency that was shared by his son-in-law and Foreign Minister in the late 1930s, Galeazzo Ciano.[39] However, Mussolini tended to generalize about many national or ethnic groups and in this respect 'the Arabs' were no different from, say, 'the Germans'.

Mussolini's early designs regarding the countries of the Middle East are somewhat difficult to pin down due to the inconsistent statements he made to different individuals, in his public speeches, and in his daily newspaper, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. Nonetheless, a few recurring patterns can be discerned. Mussolini wanted Italy to be able to compete with Britain and France in the Mediterranean. He therefore supported the independence of Middle Eastern countries from British or French domination. His use of the term 'expansion' was rather vague and could denote political, economic or cultural extension of Italian power. In an article titled '*L'estero e noi*', published on 28 April 1919, Mussolini condemned Britain's hypocrisy, displaying imperialist appetite on one hand and on the other invoking Wilsonian ideals whenever Italian interests were involved. 'Our response', wrote Mussolini, ought to be: 'long-live Italian Malta! Long-live Ireland! Egypt to the Egyptians!'[40] Three years later, when Britain declared Egypt independent, Mussolini argued that the declaration was a hollow one. Instead, he envisaged a fully independent state that would soon arise in the historic land of the Nile. Such a development would suit Italian interests, since Egypt was a land of great possibilities with a size three times that of Italy, but with a population of only 13 million. With the demise of British hegemony and with Italy as the only neighbouring Great Power, a nearby and important field would open up for Italian expansion. Mussolini believed that all the countries of the Mediterranean, and especially the ones in the east, were in a period of transition. This was an opportunity for Italy and, given a dignified and fair chance, it could surpass other states and could make of the Mediterranean what it once was for ancient Rome and Venice.[41]

Mussolini also wanted to see Syria and Palestine freed from French and British domination, thus allowing for greater Italian expansion. The Syrians, he wrote in *Il Popolo d'Italia* in June 1922, were one of the most civilized people while Syria was a rich and able country that ought to have been independent. Instead it was reduced to being a French colony

governed by terror. The French intended to turn the Mediterranean into an almost completely French sea. Could Italy remain passive? Any French expansion, he argued, diminished the chances of an Italian one.[42] During the following month Mussolini published a number of articles criticizing Italy's Foreign Minister, Carlo Schanzer, for his pro-British approach regarding Palestine. He argued that the mandate system and the Zionist policy implicit in it were detested by the inhabitants of the entire eastern Mediterranean basin and that by ratifying the mandates Italy risked alienating the sympathy of the Arabs.[43]

Mussolini's pre-March on Rome rhetoric also included strictly imperialist overtones. His repeated emphasis on modern Italy's need to follow the paths of the Roman and Venetian empires was not accidental. In a speech at Fiume on 22 May 1919, Mussolini claimed that the Mediterranean was a natural field for Italy's inevitable expansion and a doorway to Africa. He recalled the two-thousand-year-old memory of Roman domination of the black continent. He lamented the fact that the Mediterranean was controlled by the French and British, deploring Italy's failures in obtaining Cyprus and its exclusion from Tunisia. Although in 1911 Mussolini – then still a militant socialist – opposed the Libyan War, less than a decade later he argued that the conquest of Tripoli had revealed Italy to itself, arguing that this was only the start. Italy's path to greatness could not be stopped owing to its demographic mass, grand history, vitality and will. The attitude of the Versailles Peace Conference was erroneous and absurd. Italian blood was shed and now Italy asked for 'space for the elementary needs of its existence, a place in the world to fulfil its civilizing mission'. Once the Fascists began to formulate their colonial programme, they relied heavily on the Italian Nationalist Party for men and ideas.[44]

Speaking to a Fascist congress in Naples on 24 October 1922, in his last speech before the March on Rome, Mussolini made use of the slogan: 'The Mediterranean for the Mediterraneans!' However, once in power, he needed to adjust some of his rhetoric to his new position. Accordingly, on 1 November 1922 he told the British Ambassador, Sir Ronald Graham, that 'Those are things which one says when one has no responsibility, but forgets as soon as one has'.[45] Shortly afterwards, on the eve of the Conference of Lausanne, Mussolini declared that 'equality among the Allies' in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean should be preserved. While in opposition, the Fascist Party was critical towards the mandate system, but when Mussolini thought he saw an opportunity for Italian involvement in their management he took it. Following his debut diplomatic contact with the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon,

Mussolini instructed Italian officials to approach the Foreign Office with a request for Italian participation in the Middle Eastern mandates, apparently with the hope of obtaining a share in the administration of Mesopotamia. Britain, however, had no intention of relinquishing any of its mandated territories. Eventually, in September 1923, Italy had no choice but to support a resolution at Geneva, ratifying the British and French mandates in the Middle East.[46]

Middle Eastern policy during the first decade of Fascism

Recent studies have shown that Italian foreign policy during the first decade of Fascism maintained aspirations of expansion but that these were restricted by the circumstances of internal consolidation and international relations.[47] As far as policy in the Middle East was concerned, the Fascist government sought to conclude the border modifications that Italy was promised when it entered the First World War, to support the independence of Middle Eastern countries from British and French domination, and to increase Italian political and commercial penetration in the region. The indigenous revolt in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and the harsh measures adopted to quell it reflected badly on Italy's image in the Arab world, since Libya bordered on the Middle East and was linked to it through ties of language and religion. This did not allow Rome to harmonize its foreign policy of peaceful penetration and support for Arab independence with its colonial policy of repression. It seems that during the 1920s and early 1930s foreign policy and colonial considerations were not thought of as parts of an integral strategy.

In the Treaty of London (1915) Britain and France had promised Italy colonial compensation in Africa. The Milner-Scialoja Agreement of April 1920 named the Jarabub Oasis on the Libyan-Egyptian frontier and Jubaland in East Africa as the territories to be ceded by Britain. However, the implementation of this agreement was delayed for various reasons. The handing over of Jarabub was made more difficult when Egypt attained formal independence in 1922.[48] Both Liberal and Fascist-led governments held talks with senior British officials to settle these and other unresolved issues between June 1922 and December 1924. Italy's claims remained unchanged, only the style in which the Italian negotiators conducted themselves was modified. While in June 1922 Foreign Minister Carlo Schanzer argued that 'It was necessary that the Italian Government should obtain something in order to satisfy public opinion', Mussolini was more inclined to issue threats. 'If Italy failed to obtain the ratification of the Milner agreement from the Egyptian Government

it was her intention to occupy Jalabub [*sic*] militarily', he informed the British Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, in December 1924.[49] Italy urgently sought to acquire the oasis to prevent the Sanusi from using it as a base for their guerrilla campaign in Cyrenaica. Eventually, with the assistance of British diplomatic pressure on Egypt, Italy was able to take possession of Jarabub in February 1926.[50]

This creeping extension of Italian borders continued to be a method (though probably not the preferred one) of Fascist expansion in the 1930s. In October 1932 and again in May 1933, British air patrols detected Italian military presence at the Oweinat Well and at the Sarra Triangle, both on the un-demarcated Libyan-Sudanese frontier. Formal negotiations between London and Rome regarding that frontier began in November 1933. In July 1934 an agreement was signed in Rome between the British, Italian and Egyptian governments whereby the Libyan-Sudanese border was defined and Italy gained control of the Sarra Triangle.[51] In January 1935 France ceded to Italy territory on the southern frontier of Tripolitania as well as on the Eritrean-French Somaliland border as part of an agreement between Mussolini and the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval. In a way this was a continuation of the idea of an 'artichoke' policy that characterized the Cavour era, a step-by-step or leaf-by-leaf expansion of Italian power, with north-eastern Africa fulfilling the part of the main dish.[52]

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Italy's ambivalent approach towards the mandate system in the Middle East has produced different interpretations of its nature and purpose. Throughout most of the interwar period rumours persistently circulated about Rome's desire to obtain the mandate over Palestine.[53] Lord Rothermere's proposals in the *Daily Mail* in May 1927 and again in September 1929 that the British government should transfer the administration of Palestine or Iraq to the Italians aroused some attention in Italy.[54] These suggestions and rumours have led some historians into believing that Rome officially desired to take over the Palestine Mandate from London.[55] However, a closer look reveals that while such notions were supported by Catholic and Nationalist circles in Italy (for instance by Francesco Coppola, the Nationalist editor of the journal *Politica*), there is no evidence to suggest that Mussolini endorsed the idea, flattering as it was to his prestige.[56]

In fact, from 1924 onwards Italy adopted a somewhat obstructive position regarding the British Mandate in Palestine. Marquis Alberto

Theodoli, the Italian Delegate and Chairman of the Committee on Mandates in the League of Nations, was often critical of Britain's policy, arguing that it was detrimental to Catholic interests in the holy places and calling for the imposition of rigid restrictions on Jewish immigration to the country.[57] The Italians sought ways to increase their influence, though the old tactical dilemma of who to support – the Christians, the Muslims or the Jews – remained. In May 1927 the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem, Orazio Pedrazzi, explained to Mussolini that the 'classic *Terrasanta* has been surpassed by the new Palestine' and that it was the Zionists that constituted the most modern and dynamic sector of the population in the country. Rather than following Liberal Italy's traditional policy, which focused on Catholic interests, or supporting the Muslims who were in a state of decline, Pedrazzi believed that in order to extend Italy's political, economic and cultural influence in Palestine, the Fascists must work with the Jews, 'whether we like it or not'.[58]

In the 1920s the Duce still entertained the idea that if one of France's mandates fell vacant the League of Nations would bestow it on Italy. He even enquired about this possibility in a conversation with Philippe Berthelot, the Secretary General of the French Foreign Ministry (who tried to deflect Mussolini's attention away from French territories by speaking of Ethiopia).[59] However, as soon as the Duce realized that technically the mandates could not be redistributed, he reverted to his pre-March on Rome strategy of supporting the abolition of the mandates to bring about their replacement by (weak) independent states in which Italian penetration would not be thwarted.

In the 1930s Italian support for the independence of the countries of the Middle East became more pronounced. In the early summer of 1932 Foreign Minister Dino Grandi told the Chamber of Deputies that Italy had been the first European power to recognize the rising historic force of the Arabs living on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. He believed that Rome's interests and those of the Arabs corresponded. Furthermore, Arab independence would surely bring about economic, political and cultural collaboration with Italy.[60] In the autumn of the same year Italy supported the cancellation of Britain's mandate over Iraq as well as the latter's admission to the League of Nations. In 1933–4 *Il Popolo d'Italia* and even the Duce himself were temporarily favourable towards the idea of establishing a small independent Jewish state, perhaps in Palestine's coastal region.[61] Rome hoped that France's Middle Eastern mandates would meet a similar fate. From a military point of view, an independent Levant, politically detached from Paris, would deprive the French navy of its port in Beirut and would help safeguard

the Italian navy in the eastern Mediterranean in the event of an Italo-French war.[62] In 1933–4, when France proposed to allow Syria to gain independence while maintaining control over Lebanon, Mussolini instructed the Italian delegation in Geneva to object and to 'support with energy the anti-French motion'.[63] As Italy's Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs Fulvio Suvich explained, Italian aims in Syria and Lebanon were not to replace France as a mandatory power, but to do away with the mandates in order to allow these countries to become fully independent.[64]

Italy's dealings with Yemen provide an example of the type of relations the Fascist government hoped to develop with independent Middle Eastern states. Until 1933 Italian contacts with the Arab polities on the eastern shores of the Red Sea were chiefly dominated by the successive governors of Eritrea. Before and during the First World War, Italy had backed al-Idrisi, the ruler of Asir, but as the latter chose to associate himself with Britain, Italy sought new local clients.[65] Jacopo Gasparini, who was installed in Asmara in 1923, felt that Britain and France did not share with Italy the spoils they had acquired in the Middle Eastern post-war peace settlement. Hence, Italy ought to develop its own sphere of influence by establishing relations with the Arab states of the Arabian Peninsula, replacing absolute British hegemony in the region with a system of equilibrium. Gasparini launched a policy of peaceful economic penetration in Yemen, similar to the one he pursued in Ethiopia. Between 1923 and 1926 Italy began to build communications infrastructure and to provide medical services in Yemen. The doctors of the Italian medical mission in Yemen were used by the *Servizio Informazioni Militari* (SIM) to gather intelligence on political and military developments. Italy obtained a monopoly over the production and sale of any oil found in Yemen, furnished the Yemenis with arms, and began to recruit Yemenis as soldiers for service in the Italian colonial army. On 2 September 1926 Italy became the first country formally to recognize Yemen's independence when Gasparini signed a treaty of friendship and commerce with Yemen's ruler, the Imam Yahya Muhammad. Italy's growing influence in Yemen on the one hand and the rising power of Britain's ally, Abd al-Aziz al-Saud (or Ibn Saud as he was commonly referred to), ruler of Najd and Hijaz on the other, created tensions between London and Rome. While Britain and Italy were able to cooperate in Europe, in the Red Sea their relations during that period have been described as a cold war.[66]

The British government made its objection to the extension of Italian influence in this region known and soon London and Rome sat down to negotiate their mutual interests in the Arabian Peninsula and the

Red Sea. In the Rome Agreement of 7 February 1927 Italy and Britain promised to endeavour to preserve the peace between the Arab rulers on the eastern shores of the Red Sea. Despite this agreement British officials suspected that the Italians were encouraging the Imam Yahya to launch incursions across the unmarked frontier between Yemen and the Aden Protectorate. The British retaliated to these incursions by aerial bombardments of Yemeni positions. By placing greater importance on relations with local leaders than on formal agreements signed by the Italian government with other European powers, Gasparini lost sight of the bigger picture and underestimated the British response.[67] As Rome did not want to upset relations with Britain, Mussolini compelled Gasparini and his successor, Corrado Zoli, to moderate the Imam, in sharp contrast to Asmara's former policy of encouraging Yemeni expansion. Mussolini sought to limit Zoli's involvement in Yemeni affairs. The Duce emphasized that local action had to be subordinate to general aims and that Italy's interests would not benefit from a Yemeni-British clash.[68] In the following years Italy lost some of the advantageous position it had acquired in Yemen as the Imam reached agreements with the USSR (1928) and with Britain (1934). The policy of Italian economic and political penetration was toned down to such an extent that the Ministry for the Colonies admitted that 'it is our present interest, for the political purpose of preserving the balance of power in the Red Sea, that Russian influence be strengthened to oppose British influence.'[69]

Despite the setback in Yemen, the governors of Eritrea retained their relative independence in dealing with the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula. In December 1929 Zoli – with the consent of Raffaele Guariglia, the Director General for Europe, the Levant and Africa at the Foreign Ministry – established posts and a 'native village' manned by colonial soldiers on the Red Sea Islands of Hanish and Jabal Zuqar.[70] In summer 1932 Zoli's replacement, Riccardo Astuto, meddled in a revolt against Ibn Saud in Asir. The Foreign Ministry opposed Astuto's line of action, pointing out that aiding the revolt endangered relations with Ibn Saud, whose position as ruler of Hijaz and Najd Italy had only recently recognized. It therefore demanded that the Governor of Eritrea be instructed to maintain a neutral position.[71]

Italian political manoeuvres in the Red Sea region in the 1920s were the most dynamic part of Italy's foreign policy in the Arab world and consequently generated more friction and competition with Britain than was otherwise the norm in other parts of the world. Mussolini was well aware of Britain's strength and often opted to cooperate with rather than antagonize London. The Duce restrained over-zealous diplomats

who sought to establish ties with Egyptian nationalists in order to weaken Britain's position there. In December 1926 he wrote that 'we need not be direct or indirect supporters of the Egyptian Nationalist Party [...] A re-emergence of the power of Egyptian nationalism will constitute a threat and danger to our neighbouring colonies as well as to our general interests in the Muslim world.'[72] In Austen Chamberlain Mussolini found a suitable ally for an Anglo-Italian 'special relationship'. Once he became Foreign Secretary, Chamberlain stressed the necessity of the occidental nations standing together against the rising tide of anti-colonialism. Chamberlain's support was instrumental in gaining Jarabub from Egypt. In return Mussolini supported Britain in its dispute with Turkey over Mosul in northern Iraq, explaining that Britain had offered Italy support 'especially in the colonial and Mediterranean fields'.[73]

In the 1920s and early 1930s Italy's main adversary in the field of Great Power politics was France. In the Mediterranean France was a competitor. Furthermore, the close relations between Paris and Belgrade posed the threat of a two front war if the tension between Italy and Yugoslavia was to escalate. As a result of the Italo-French rivalry Italian delegates at the League of Nations adopted a critical approach towards the way the French were managing their mandates in the Middle East. Italy's position supporting Syrian independence led nationalist circles there to approach the Italian representative in Beirut and to ask for greater Italian involvement in their struggle against the French authorities. Rome's response was unsure and inconsistent.[74] In the late 1920s and early 1930s Italy's propaganda apparatus and intelligence services were not yet in a position to carry out subversive campaigns comparable to those executed during the second half of the 1930s.

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The greatest setback for Italy's policy in the Middle East during the 1920s and early 1930s was the revolt in Libya. In January 1922 Count Giuseppe Volpi, Governor of Tripolitania, launched the military 're-conquest' of the colony. After the Fascist March on Rome this policy was eagerly supported by the new government. While Tripolitania was pacified by the mid-1920s, resistance in Cyrenaica, spearheaded by the Sanusi order and its military leader, Umar al-Mukhtar, persisted. Italian authorities in Libya were concerned about the presence of many a Cyrenaican refugee in Egypt, including the head of the Sanusi, Sayyid Muhammad Idris (the future King Idris al-Sanusi of Libya). They suspected

that Egypt was assisting the revolt in Cyrenaica with British approval.[75] The Italians wanted to cut off the rebels' ability to re-supply. Subsequently suppression in Cyrenaica, led by General Rodolfo Graziani, took on a brutal form. On 25 June 1930 Italian troops began clearing out the region of Jabal al-Akhdar. Within nine months a large portion of the population of Cyrenaica were driven out of their homes, made to march great distances and confined inside barbed wire enclosures in a number of concentration camps on the coastal strip. Conditions in theses camps were terrible. Estimates of the human death toll vary between 40,000 and 65,000. Between 80 and 90 per cent of sheep, goats, horses and camels died, leaving many families without their means of livelihood. In addition, a 270km fence was constructed along the Egyptian-Libyan border to prevent the Sanusi from escaping. On 12 September 1931 Italian troops captured the elderly al-Mukhtar and, after a short trial, had him executed in front of a large crowd in one of the concentration camps. On 24 January 1932 the Governor in Tripoli, General Pietro Badoglio, announced the complete conquest of the country.[76]

Italy's repressive policy in Libya was widely denounced in Middle Eastern political circles and in the Arab and Muslim press. In 1929 a Damascene association of Libyan exiles had pamphlets distributed during the annual pilgrimage in Mecca, calling for Muslim solidarity against Italy. Similarly, in January 1930 the Palestinian daily *Al-Jama'a al-Arabiyya* called on all Muslims and Arabs to sever their relations with Italy.[77] The execution of Umar al-Mukhtar was criticized by the press across the Middle East. In Cairo a memorial ceremony was organized to honour the dead rebel leader. The Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram* reported that the army and police surrounded the location where the ceremony was to be held and caused its cancellation for fear of upsetting relations with Italy and causing local unrest. Prince Umar Tusun, the Egyptian King's cousin, wrote to the organizers of the ceremony, describing al-Mukhtar as a great Arab leader and a loyal and heroic Muslim. Prominent Arabs leaders in Palestine also paid their respects to the Sanusi leader, observing a moment of silence at a meeting in Nablus. In 1932 the main street in Gaza was named after al-Mukhtar, despite Italian objections.[78]

Italian repression in Libya was also harshly condemned during the Pan-Islamic Congress that was held in Jerusalem in December 1931. The delegates attending included the Syrian journalist Muhammad Ali al-Tahir, owner of *Al-Shura*, who had often attacked Italian policy in Libya, and the Egyptian politician Abd al-Rahman Azzam. The latter's criticism of Italy's policy was so severe that the High Commissioner for Palestine, Arthur Wauchope, expelled him from the country (the Italian

embassy in London, which was worried lest the congress encourage a boycott of Italian products, approached the Foreign Office in an attempt to curtail anti-Italian manifestations). Wauchope also issued a press release condemning the anti-Italian attitude of the congress and emphasizing that Italy was a friendly state.[79] Italian atrocities in Libya and the anti-Italian position of the Islamic Congress were given wide coverage in the pages of *La Nation Arabe*, a pan-Islamic journal published in Europe by Shakib Arslan and Ihsan al-Jabiri.[80]

In March 1932 the President of the Pan-Islamic Congress, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, sent two letters of protest to the Italian Foreign Ministry, one specifically denouncing the atrocities committed by the Italians in Libya and the other generally protesting European colonization of Muslim countries.[81] Despite his young age (he was still in his thirties) the ambitious Husayni held a pivotal role in Palestinian politics, both as a scion of one of the most prominent Arab families in the country and due to his religious position as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. In the early 1930s the Italian Foreign Ministry considered the Mufti to be a trouble-making opponent. Luigi Gabbrielli, the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem, complained about the 'systematic' anti-Italian campaign conducted by the Arab press in Palestine and was incensed by the fact that the Mandatory government was tolerating these 'actions provoked by the Mufti of Jerusalem'.[82] Ironically, within a few years, Husayni would become a staunch ally of Fascist Italy.

The rise of the pro-Muslim policy

The early 1930s heralded a change in Italian foreign policy. The world economic crisis that followed the 1929 Wall Street crash, the failure of international disarmament and the political instability in Europe, caused by the rise of the Nazi Party in Germany, had upset the global balance of power and increased Italy's margin of initiative.[83] In 1932 the Italian Colonial Minister, General Emilio De Bono, began to lobby for a policy of expansion in East Africa and the Red Sea. High ranking Foreign Ministry officials at the Palazzo Chigi also advocated a similar approach, possibly in order to deflect the Duce's attention from Europe to relatively safer ventures in a more distant part of the world.[84] Like his subordinates, Mussolini believed that the current state of international affairs provided Italy with an opportunity to make colonial gains in Africa and to pursue a more dynamic foreign policy elsewhere. One of the outcomes of this general change was a shift in Rome's approach towards the countries of the Middle East. Italy had already lent its

(primarily vocal) support to Arab countries in the region that were struggling to gain their independence. However, during 1933–4 Rome began not only to support Arab nationalism but also to exhibit its respect towards the Islamic religion.

Fascist Italy's pro-Muslim policy, which is commonly associated with anti-British activity, actually had its roots in what Alan Cassels called 'Mussolini's quarrel with France'.[85] In late March 1933 the Italian Foreign Ministry believed that the French government was organizing a vast propaganda campaign in its Muslim domains aimed against Italy. It was feared that such a campaign might provide the French with manpower in case of a war with Italy. Rome believed that the French were provoking a boycott movement against Italian merchandise, using Muslim propagandists for their purposes. Consequently, Palazzo Chigi proposed to create 'secret centres of philo-Italian propaganda' in Muslim countries, to strengthen ties with leading Muslim figures such as King Ibn Saud and 'to spread the notion that Italy desires and augments the political and economic independence of all the countries inhabited by Muslims'. It also proposed a gradual policy of clemency towards the deportees from Cyrenaica.[86]

The Fascist regime now took a decision to adopt 'a more energetic policy' in the Muslim and Arab world.[87] On 22 May 1933 Suvich addressed the Chamber of Deputies and told them that 'it would be well to confirm explicitly' that Italy, which had always treated its own Muslim subjects with a longstanding respect for Islamic customs and traditions, followed the progress of the countries of the Middle East with great sympathy. 'There are no contrasts separating us from the countries of the Levant', on the contrary, he saw ample room for cultural and intellectual comprehension and collaboration. That being the case, he announced the government's decision to 'adapt its political actions towards the states of the Near East'.[88] In December 1933 the Italian government used the inauguration of the *Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente* (Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East) to convene an international congress for Asian students, whose participants were received by Mussolini on the Capitoline Hill in Rome.[89]

In a speech delivered to the Fascist Party Assembly in Rome on 18 March 1934, Mussolini stated that Italy was the nearest to Africa and Asia of all the great western powers of Europe. He then went on to speak of 'natural expansion which should lead to collaboration between Italy and the nations of the Near and Middle East'.[90] The Duce expressed similar views at the opening of the Levant Fair in Bari on 6 September 1934. He called on the people of the Orient 'near and far' to trade and to

collaborate in goodwill with Fascist Italy, a collaboration which should be both 'material' and 'ideological'.[91] Mussolini had voiced similar ideas in the past. In February 1924 he stated that 'Now Italy can only move to the east. In the west there are old established nation states […] The direction of pacific penetration for Italy therefore lies towards the east.'[92] However, except for local initiatives in the Red Sea, Fascist aspirations and rhetoric were not backed up by a coherent policy or allocation of funds. A decade later things were different. In 1933–4 the new policy was harnessed to serve both colonial and foreign policy interests. With the Sanusi revolt finally quelled, the Fascist regime sought to open a new, more tolerant page in its relations with the population of Libya and to improve the tarnished image Italy had acquired in the Arab world.

On 31 October 1933 Mussolini appointed a new governor for Libya – Italo Balbo, one of the *quadrumviri* of the March on Rome and hitherto Minister of Aviation. While the Air Marshal was at first offended by his 'exile', he soon became reconciled with his new position. He brought with him both an organizational thrust and a new approach towards the indigenous population. In December 1934 Balbo oversaw the unification of the two provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under one government, with Tripoli as its capital. Construction schemes, which were initiated by his predecessors, Emilio De Bono and Pietro Badoglio, were intensified.

With regard to the Libyan population, one of Balbo's first acts as Governor was to abolish the last camps in which most of the population of the region of Jabal al-Akhdar had been interned. He also pardoned numerous political prisoners.[93] The Air Marshal treated the colony's subjects more leniently than his predecessors. Only three death sentences were carried out during his governorship. While he undoubtedly benefited from the total pacification of the colony, on a more personal level, Balbo believed that the example of Italian civilization and way of life would awaken in the Libyans 'their consciousness and dignity as a Mediterranean people'. He hoped to delay the tide of Arab nationalism long enough for the colony to have a predominantly Italian population capable of resisting it.[94] In the meantime he exhibited respect to Muslim traditions and funded the reconstruction of mosques, hoping to avert future unrest. De Bono before him also sought to respect local customs and religion, but Balbo had better access to the media and received better press coverage. For instance, the Air Marshal allowed himself to be filmed eating cuscus with Cyrenaican notables, thus demonstrating his accessibility as well as his trust towards the indigenous population.[95]

One of the most significant efforts that Balbo intensified was the repatriation of Cyrenaican exiles from Egypt to Libya. When the Sanusi revolt was crushed there were an estimated twelve thousand exiles in Egypt.[96] In 1932 Italian authorities in Egypt assisted the return of 18 people to Libya. In the following years their number rose continually: to 503 in 1933, then to 2037 in 1934, finally reaching 3526 in 1935.[97] Under Balbo Libya would gradually turn from a source of embarrassment for Italian foreign policy in the Middle East to a source of pride.

Political contacts with Muslim leaders

The new policy in Libya was one of the factors which helped to 'convert' two figures who were to play a high profile role in Italy's Middle Eastern policy in the following years: the Lebanese Druze, Amir Shakib Arslan, and the Syrian Muslim, Ihsan Bey al-Jabiri. The two were exiled by the French mandate authorities and resided in Geneva. As the representatives of the Syrian-Palestinian Congress – a loosely affiliated group of inter-Arab politicians which was formed in the aftermath of the First World War – they tried to promote the ideas of Arab independence and unity at the League of Nations. Arslan and Jabiri also edited the pan-Islamic journal *La Nation Arabe*. The more prominent of the two, Arslan, was an old opponent of Italian colonialism in Libya, having fought on the side of the Ottomans against the Italian invaders in 1912. He first met Mussolini in summer 1922, before the March on Rome. This meeting probably inspired Mussolini to publish the article in *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 16 June 1922 mentioned above, in which he supported Syrian independence and opposed Britain's Zionist policy in Palestine. Despite this personal acquaintance with the Duce, Arslan's *La Nation Arabe* repeatedly denounced Italian repression in Libya during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Then, in June 1933 Arslan cast aside his former criticism of Italy's conduct in Cyrenaica and published an article in the Palestinian daily *Al-Jama'a al-Arabiyya*, expressing his approval of the Italian amnesty in Libya.[98] According to William Cleveland, Rome did not anticipate this sudden change of heart: 'It is clear from the tone of surprise … that Arslan's article was published without the advance knowledge of the Foreign Office in Rome.'[99] However, the possibility of 'buying up' the Amir was discussed as early as 29 March 1933. The Italian Foreign Ministry was hoping to make use of Arslan's economic difficulties and through an 'informant', who was a close acquaintance of his, to 'win him over to our cause'.[100]

In order to approach Arslan in a discreet manner, the Italian Foreign Ministry used the services of Dr Carlo Arturo Enderle, a Rome-based psychiatrist of Muslim descent.[101] It is unclear from the available sources exactly how and when Rome was able to befriend Arslan. However, in December 1933, the Amir attended the Asian Student Congress that was held in the Italian capital and was later received by Mussolini in Rome on 13 and again on 15 February 1934. The Amir called upon the Duce to pardon Libyan exiles, to allow them to return to their lands and to offer them financial assistance, to restore and repair Sanusi property which had been confiscated and damaged during the revolt, and to provide modern education for Libya's youth. By fulfilling these requests, he claimed, Italy would earn the friendship of the Arabs of the Levant.[102] Later Arslan would argue that his support for and lack of criticism towards Italian policy were unavoidable, since Mussolini had upheld his half of the bargain. He would even take credit for bringing about the shift in Italy's policy in Libya.[103] This, however, was an exaggeration, since Balbo's measures for the benefit of the Libyan population had already been launched independently of Arslan's request. Moreover, the Italians had colonial considerations of their own for adopting a more tolerant policy in Libya. Nonetheless, Mussolini earned an ally in his propaganda campaign to win the hearts of the Arabs in the Middle East. Durable contacts between Arslan and Italian officials, including an arrangement for financial assistance, were established by April 1934.[104]

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In the early 1930s Rome tightened its control over Italian relations with the Arab states on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. Representatives from the Foreign, Colonies and Finance Ministries met in October 1931 and agreed to establish and fund the *Società Anonima di Navigazione Eritrea* (SANE), which soon assumed responsibility over all commercial transactions with Yemen, including the supply of arms requested by the Imam Yahya.[105] As the Imam refused to accept any official diplomatic representatives, Italian activity in Yemen was conducted through a medical mission. In November 1933 Rome instructed the head of the medical mission to communicate directly with the Foreign Ministry and to abandon the roundabout route through Asmara.[106]

Developments in the Arabian Peninsula provided Italy with an opportunity to reassert its position in that region. In November 1930 Ibn Saud announced the annexation of Asir and by early 1933 was able to quell a local revolt led by the Idrisi, the region's former rulers. Asir was also

coveted by the Imam of Yemen. Italy supported the Imam's claim to Asir and soon Yemeni troops began to encroach upon it. Ibn Saud responded with force. Saudi troops launched a counteroffensive and routed the Yemenis. By the beginning of May 1934 the Saudis were advancing on the Yemeni port of Hodeidah. Baron Pompeo Aloisi, Head of the Italian Foreign Ministry Cabinet, confided in his diary that 'King Ibn Seoud [*sic*] seems to have defeated our friend the Imam Yahya. Thus all our policy in the Yemen would be grounded.'[107] The 1927 Rome Agreement between Italy and Britain prevented the two governments from intervening in any conflict in the Arabian Peninsula, but Italy nonetheless sent a navy ship to Hodeidah and landed troops, arguing that these were intended to protect the Europeans residing there. Britain and France responded by sending their own ships to the harbour and, for a while, Anglo-Italian relations became strained. However, the speedy conclusion of a Saudi-Yemeni peace settlement helped to defuse the situation.[108] Soon afterwards Mussolini and the Italian Foreign Ministry began to see Ibn Saud as the most prominent leader in the Arab world and strove to strengthen relations with him, while trying not to alienate the Imam Yahya.[109]

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When the Italian Foreign Ministry outlined its new strategy vis-à-vis the Muslim world in late March 1933, one of the modes of action it considered was 'to strengthen relations with the Pan-Islamic Committee of Jerusalem and eventually to subsidize it.'[110] In May 1933 the new Italian Consul General in Jerusalem, Mariano De Angelis, acquainted himself with Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the Mufti of Jerusalem and Head of the Pan-Islamic Committee. During their three-hour conversation De Angelis protested the Mufti's 'unfounded' anti-Italian position. The Mufti in turn reiterated his condemnation of Italian atrocities in Libya. He then inquired into the possibility of visiting the Italian colony. Though he described Husayni as having 'mediocre intelligence', the Italian Consul General seems to have been pleased with the results of this first meeting.[111]

The Mufti soon encountered more encouragement to reconsider his approach towards Italy. In May 1934 Husayni and Shakib Arslan headed an Islamic peace delegation to end the hostilities between Ibn Saud and Imam Yahya of Yemen. The delegation remained in the Arabian Peninsula for nearly two months. In June 1934 Muhammad Raghib Bey, the Yemeni Foreign Minister who had cordial relations with Italy, met the Mufti and advised him 'to turn to a Power capable of giving [him] suitable support and suggested to probe the Soviet or Italian governments in this regard.'

In early July Husayni and Arslan spent three days in Asmara as the personal guests of Riccardo Astuto, the Italian Governor of Eritrea. After his return to Palestine the Mufti, accompanied by Ihsan Jabiri, met with De Angelis, who reported that the Mufti professed his 'will for friendship and collaboration with Italy'.[112] It is clear from Italian sources that Husayni was perceived as an important leader whose support would further Italian interests in the region. It was probably a combination of Italy's new pro-Muslim policy, the wooing by Italian officials such as De Angelis and Astuto, as well as the advice of Arslan, Jabiri and the Yemeni Foreign Minister which finally induced the Mufti to turn to Italy for support once the struggle against the British Mandate began to unfold.

Rome as a bridge between East and West: Cultural dimensions and propaganda

As we have seen, the Italian decision to adopt a pro-Muslim approach was based on *realpolitik* considerations. Nonetheless, the new policy had a distinct cultural and intellectual dimension to it. Italian clergymen, academic experts, journalists, travel writers and, of course, government officials had published texts on the Middle East long before 1933. Many of these texts lobbied for greater Italian involvement in the region's affairs and some of them pointed out that Italy could benefit from a philo-Islamic policy. In the first decade of the twentieth century Enrico Insabato, an autodidact orientalist who had spent a few years in Egypt and whose suggestions reached Giolitti, argued that a favourable approach towards the Muslim communities in Eritrea and Somalia would assist Italy in its colonial and foreign policies. Insabato also petitioned the Italian government to establish a mosque in Rome and to create a transport service to Mecca for the benefit of Muslim pilgrims. For a while he edited a bilingual Italian-Arab paper in Cairo that sought to create 'a solid base on which Italy's philo-Islamic policy could lean.'[113] In 1928 the former Undersecretary at the Ministry for the Colonies, Roberto Cantalupo, stressed the need for Italy to use Libya, Eritrea and Somalia as bridgeheads for the purpose of commercial and cultural 'infiltration' into the rest of the Muslim world.[114]

However, during the 1920s the two most common justifications for an extension of Italy's influence in the Middle East were the country's rights as a Catholic power and the heritage of the Roman Empire. An example of the fusion of both ideas can be found in a travelogue written by Raimondo Falci, a correspondent for *Il Giornale d'Italia* and *Epoca*, who travelled through Egypt, Palestine, Turkey and Greece in the early 1920s. For him

the 'sacred orient', where the light of faith was revealed to humanity, was also the place in which one could understand what it meant to be Italian. Moreover, in every part of the journey from North Africa to Palestine, Italians could witness and become inspired by the achievements of their great ancestors.[115] Similar sentiments could be found throughout the Italian press. The Catholic and patriotic journal *Rassegna Nazionale*, for instance, stressed Italy's privileged historic and spiritual position in the region, particularly in Palestine.[116] Indeed, the regime sought to affirm its position in the Holy Land, even if only symbolically. Presumably counting on the support of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, the Italian Luigi Barlassina, a Fascist Party official wrote to the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre in February 1927, pointing out 'how greatly H. E. Mussolini has at heart the prestige of Catholicism and Italy in Palestine; and how it is always the wish of the Duce to acquire greater influence through our joint institutions which have such historical and political importance.' In March 1929, following the signature of the Lateran Treaties between the Italian state and the Papacy, Mussolini was decorated with the insignia of a Knight First Class of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre.[117]

Catholic justifications for greater Italian involvement in Middle Eastern affairs can still be found in works from the 1930s, though by this stage most academic and popular texts dealing with the region sought to present Italy as a philo-Islamic power. The transformation in Italian policy towards the countries of the Middle East was of special interest to Italy's leading orientalists. Along with his colleagues, Carlo Alfonso Nallino, the most prominent Italian orientalist of the interwar period, had tried to bring the harsh criticism against Italy in the Muslim world during the last stage of the Sanusi revolt to the attention of the Italian elite. The *Istituto per l'Oriente* (IPO), of which Nallino was the academic director, believed that only deep comprehension of Islam and the Arab world offered the key to successful Italian penetration. In the early 1930s this mildly critical stance elicited an angry response from General Rodolfo Graziani, the Deputy Governor of Cyrenaica, De Bono and other colonial circles. They went as far as questioning Nallino's loyalty to the regime and his patriotism. After the revolt in Libya was quelled this dispute died down.[118]

In many respects the shift in Italy's Middle Eastern policy in 1933–4 suited IPO's line of thought. Though the government had made use of Nallino's expertise in the past and although IPO's monthly journal *Oriente Moderno* had been supported by the Italian Foreign Ministry since its inception in 1921, it was the new pro-Muslim policy that paved the way for a more intense collaboration between the institute and the state in the 1930s. Already in late 1932, one of IPO's orientalists pointed

out that Fascism had gained adherents in the Middle East even without a coordinated propaganda campaign explaining the doctrine and its principles. The regime, he argued, should strengthen its links with the Arab world and encourage students from Arab countries to come to Italy in order for them to return home with a positive impression.[119] In 1934, when the regime began to broadcast radio programmes in Arabic, Nallino was one of the examiners assessing the linguistic capabilities of Enrico Nuné who soon became an important player in Italy's Middle Eastern propaganda.[120] In the late 1930s and even more so during the Second World War the works of some of IPO's members become unreservedly mobilized and moved further and further away from impartial academic research.[121]

The contribution of the orientalists and other academic experts to Italy's policy in the Middle East was twofold. On the one hand they endeavoured to show Italy's good face abroad. When Shakib Arslan convened an international Islamic congress in Geneva in 1935, Count Bernardo Barbiellini Amidei, the director of the *Istituto Superiore Orientale di Napoli*, and Laura Veccia Vaglieri of IPO attended. The latter delivered a speech in Arabic on the beneficial reforms instituted by Italy for its Muslim subjects. In the same year Veccia Vaglieri visited Palestine where Sulayman al-Taji al-Faruqi, owner of *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, held a public meeting in Jaffa in her honour.[122] On the other hand at home scholars of various backgrounds published articles and books in an attempt (which was never very successful) to increase awareness in Italy of 'eastern' affairs. The travel writer Franco Ciarlantini accused the British of deliberately setting Arabs against Jews in Palestine. He argued that Italy was more sympathetic to Arab nationalism than Britain and that the Islamic world was turning to Fascist Italy with growing anticipation of future collaboration. The jurists Ignazio Tambaro and Gaspare Ambrosini criticized the Anglo-French mandate system. The latter emphasized that Italy, like the Arabs, had been treated unjustly by its allies in the Great War. The diplomat Romolo Tritonj praised the Italian government's support for Syrian independence from France. He also welcomed the Duce's decision to intensify relations with African and Asian countries. By doing so, he argued, Italy would not only assist in these countries' development, but also resume Rome's historic role as a bridge between East and West.[123]

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To reach the peoples of the Middle East the Italians relied on propaganda. The Fascist regime placed great importance on mass propaganda in its

attempt to mobilize support at home and abroad. During the 1930s the Italians drew on the organizational model of Nazi Germany's propaganda apparatus and gave their own propaganda increasing institutional significance. In July 1934 the Foreign Ministry's press office became the *Ufficio Stampa e Servizio Propaganda* and was upgraded later that year into an Undersecretariat for Press and Propaganda. In 1935 it became the Ministry for Press and Propaganda and in 1937 its title was changed to the Ministry of Popular Culture.[124]

Throughout the 1920s Italian cultural propaganda in the Middle East focused on winning the hearts of local Christians and on transforming Italian communities in the region into showcases of the new Italy.[125] In the 1930s the emphasis, volume and means of Fascist propaganda aimed at the Arab world changed. One of the main characteristics of Italy's new pro-Muslim policy was its reliance upon propaganda. Easily controlled from Rome, the propaganda campaign could be intensified, diminished, altered or silenced whenever the need arose. The Middle East provided a fertile field for Italian propaganda. The Arab press, particularly small newspapers, suffered from a chronic lack of funds. Economically failing papers were often forced to accept external donations and consequently to take note of the donor's requests.[126] The Italians offered financial incentives to various Middle Eastern newspapers. However, Italian funds did not always succeed in converting the Arab press into fully fledged supporters. More often Rome's financial assistance served to diminish criticism. Local papers would publish pro-Italian articles alongside anti-Italian ones, allowing editors to show a return on the investment without antagonizing anti-colonialist circles.

In April 1934 the Italian Consul in Damascus, Casto Caruso, complained that the local press was ignoring Italy. He stated that *baksheesh* was necessary, arguing that the French were using the same method. Accordingly, the Undersecretary for Press and Propaganda, Galeazzo Ciano, allocated 2,000 lire for Damascus and authorised the Consul to subsidize the local papers *Alif-Ba* and *Fata al-Arab*. His colleague in Beirut received 6,000 lire for expenditure related to propaganda. The Consul General in Jerusalem was given 4,000 lire for the Jaffa daily *Al- Jama'a al-Islamiyya* and was instructed to send copies of this paper to Tripolitania and Cyrenaica so that they could be distributed among the Libyan population.[127] In order to dispel anti-Italian feelings in the Muslim world, caused by the years of repression in Libya, Ciano sought to provide diplomatic outposts in the Middle East with publications and photographs illustrating the improved conditions of Italy's Arab subjects.[128] When the Ethiopian Crisis began to gain momentum

in 1935, the Press and Propaganda Ministry increased the amounts allocated for subsidizing the Arab press and made greater efforts to furnish Italian officials in the Middle East with articles and photographs for distribution and publication.

The Fascist regime also spent considerable sums on cultural propaganda. In late 1933 and early 1934 the Italian Consul General in Beirut, Attilio De Cicco, noted that France's position in the Levant was in a state of decline. He advocated a policy of increased Italian cultural and economic activity in Syria and Lebanon, asking for funds to be allocated for strengthening local Italian schools, suggesting greater Italian investment in local industry and calling for an improvement in commercial shipping between Italy and the Levant to encourage tourism.[129] De Cicco was, in fact, preaching to the converted. Increased commercial and cultural activity in this region was precisely what the Fascist leadership had in mind. From 1933 onwards the Italian government organized subsidized summer visits to Italy for groups of Syrian and Lebanese teenagers and students. These visits were designed to create a favourable image of Fascist Italy among the young visitors and their families.[130]

The flagship of Italian propaganda in the Middle East was Radio Bari – a station which, despite its name, transmitted on shortwave from Rome.[131] In May 1934 the radio station began to broadcast regular programmes in Arabic, which included music and news. Initially the station concentrated on cultural propaganda, praising Italy and the Fascist regime. Italian assistance to the Libyan *Waqf* – the public body in charge of Muslim religious endowment – was one of the first items to be aired.[132] The transmissions of Radio Bari were received not only in Libya, but also in Egypt, Palestine, Syria and even the Arabian Peninsula. A few years later Ciano recorded his version of the origins of the Arab transmissions of Radio Bari in his diary:

> When I was Undersecretary for Propaganda I was asked to find a job for an Arab-Italian, the brother of a bishop, Monsignor Cattan. I took him into the Ministry. He spoke Arabic well. We had him give a few lectures and a news broadcast. It was successful: many letters began to arrive from Palestine, Syria and Egypt. We improved upon it. Then we had to fire Cattan because, on his own initiative, he insulted the English, with whom at the time we had good relations. But, given the success of the initiative, I didn't want to interrupt it and so [it was] continued after Cattan's departure. However, I had no idea I had created an issue that would cause such friction with Great Britain.[133]

Perhaps Ciano's memory failed him, but this description of the nearly accidental birth of Radio Bari's broadcasts in Arabic is somewhat misleading. From the very start the station was an instrument in the regime's wider attempt to improve its image in the Arab world. Moreover, according to Enrico Nuné, Cattan was replaced not for criticizing the British but because he and his brother used Radio Bari to attack and settle scores with Lebanese notables, much to the displeasure of the Italian Consul General in Beirut. Finally, it is unlikely that the development of Radio Bari's Arabic programme was the result of 'many letters' from the Arab world since at first these were quite sparse.[134]

However, the station's popularity grew rapidly from 1935 onwards, partly because of its high standard of entertainment and partly because of the growing number of radio sets in the Middle East. The lack of competition from other radio stations enabled the Italians to pioneer this new method of reaching mass audiences abroad over the heads of the local political leadership. Radio had the advantage of being a public medium that could also appeal to illiterate people and could thus reach a wider audience than newspapers. Many café owners set up loudspeakers for the benefit of their customers. In Palestine villagers reportedly came regularly to Jaffa during the evenings to listen to the broadcasts by this means. Indeed, the French Mandate authorities in Syria and Lebanon as well as their British counterparts in Palestine and Egypt soon noticed that radio transmissions were effective as a means of propagating Fascist ideas and even shaping public opinion.[135]

Middle Eastern attitudes towards Italy and Fascism

In the interwar period Italy and Fascism were not always treated in the same manner by Middle Eastern societies. The question of Middle Eastern responses to Fascism has generated intense academic debate. Basheer Nafi has argued that those who became involved in the Arab-Axis imbroglio were concerned with practical *realpolitik* considerations and paid little attention to ideological complexities. More recent studies have underlined the context of a generational conflict between emerging radical circles of the urban middle classes and the still dominant Ottoman-educated elites.[136] As Haggai Erlich notes, following the Grand Crisis in the western economies, the prestige of Britain and France in Arab eyes began to erode, and the image of Fascist efficiency presented itself as an alternative. Furthermore, the crisis itself extended to the Middle East and brought hardship to Arab societies, primarily to the educated youth and the professional middle class. Against a background of growing urban

unemployment, detachment from traditional ways of life, humiliation at foreign occupation, a feeling that foreigners and minorities were blocking upward mobility and frustration at the mildness and even corruption of the traditional leadership, the model of revitalized nationalism offered by Fascism and later Nazism became more appealing. Fascism represented the cult of power and youth, a strong authoritarian leadership, bold defiance and an image of efficiency and discipline. As such it was able to attract some adherents.[137]

As in other parts of the world, political parties and youth movements promoting integral nationalism were established in the Middle East during the 1920s and 1930s. These included 'Young Egypt' (*misr al-fatah*), the *Parti Populaire Syrien*, the Syrian 'Steel Shirts' and the *Futuwwah* in Iraq. Some of these movements adopted Fascist attributes, such as hand salutes, uniforms, militant slogans, parades and paramilitary training. In many respects this was a sign of the times. However, none of the integralist-nationalist movements in the Middle East attained power or commanded the support of the majority of the population during the interwar period. Moreover, Peter Wien has argued that for many being pro-fascist was a 'flirt' or a fashion, and that their ideological commitment was superficial.[138]

The Revisionist Zionist movement in Palestine differed from other contemporary ultranationalist movements in the Middle East insofar as its membership was Jewish, but in aesthetic terms it shared some characteristics with the Arab movements mentioned above. Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky, the movement's leader who in the past had been a student in Rome (1898–1901), admired the Italian language and culture. Though often labelled by contemporaries as a Fascist, his approach towards Fascism was ambiguous. On one hand he maintained contacts with Fascist officials, sought to meet with Mussolini and worked hard to have Revisionist Zionist cadets admitted to the maritime school at Civitavecchia. This last effort bore fruit in 1934 when the Fascist regime authorized a group of the Revisionist movement's members to begin training. On the other hand, Jabotinsky refused on principle to accept money from the Italian government and was often critical of various aspects of the Fascist doctrine. He viewed Italy as a political and cultural counterweight against a potentially overwhelming British domination of Zionist affairs, but refused to place his movement solely within Rome's sphere.[139]

While not omnipresent, positive references to Fascism could be found in the Arab press of the early 1930s. Occasionally, one paper or another declared the desirability of forming a Palestinian Fascist youth movement to revive the country's nationalist struggle or lamented the

absence of a Fascist-style leader who would guide the Arabs towards independence.[140] Conservative newspapers in Egypt, especially those with close ties to the court and to the authoritarian Prime Minister Ismail Sidki, gave Mussolini and the Fascist regime a relatively favourable coverage. The popular weekly *Al-Musawwar*, for example, published an article in May 1934 expressing a desire to see the Egyptian youth organized along the Fascist and Nazi models.[141] According to Wien, the Iraqi Arab nationalist discourse of the time contained multifaceted perceptions of authoritarianism, totalitarianism, and Fascism. Opinions there ranged from absolute rejection to wholehearted approval of the supposed achievements of the totalitarian organization of society.[142]

The Fascist doctrine aside, Italy's policy of friendship towards the Muslim world was received by Middle Eastern elites with suspicion and scepticism. Memories of Italy's repressive policy in Cyrenaica were still fresh. In Palestine the daily *Filastin* pointed out in May 1932 that Italy's position of supporting the termination of the mandates in the Arab countries stood in sharp contrast to Italian colonization of Libya, while *Jama'a al-Arabyyia* and *Jama'a al-Islamiyya* repeatedly denounced Italy's policy of repression in Libya and were mistrustful of Italian attempts to gain the Arabs' friendship.[143] When the Yemeni-Saudi border dispute broke out in spring 1934, the Egyptian *Lataif* published a caricature showing the puppets of the Imam Yahya and Ibn Saud fighting while Mussolini and John Bull pull the strings.[144]

Occasionally, the Italian government managed to get its message across. In June 1933 an Italian official in Beirut, who was quoted in the Arab press, explained that Italy did not plan for military conquest in the east, but merely sought commercial outlets.[145] On the eve of the royal visit of King Vittorio Emanuele III and Queen Elena to Egypt in February 1933, the Italian historian Angelo Sammarco published an article in the popular daily *Al-Ahram*, in which he surveyed the history of the Italian community in Egypt and emphasized the traditional friendship between the two Mediterranean countries.[146] However, despite these and other efforts, the Middle East was far from ready to embrace the Duce. As the next chapter will show, in 1935 Middle Eastern debates regarding Fascism and Italian foreign policy intensified as Italy's dispute with Ethiopia gained momentum.

Conclusions

Fascist foreign policy inherited many of Liberal Italy's aspirations in the Middle East. Like his predecessors, Mussolini sought to extend Italian

political, commercial and cultural 'penetration' in Syria, Palestine, Egypt and on the eastern shores of the Red Sea. While aims and goals remained the same, some of the Duce's methods and means were new. The adoption of an official pro-Muslim policy was a Fascist innovation. Italian diplomats in the Middle East and officials in Libya had advocated, and at times even practised, a pro-Muslim policy during the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s.[147] However, only in 1933–4 did this become official state policy to be utilized for both foreign and colonial purposes. This new course of action was the result of a conjuncture of circumstances. First of all, Italy's margin of initiative, especially outside Europe, increased owing to the political instability on the continent. Secondly, after the suppression of the Sanusi revolt, Rome sought a new and more moderate policy in Libya. Finally, the regime was fearful lest France try to mobilize Muslim public opinion against Italy.

The new pro-Muslim approach allowed for greater harmony between Italian colonial and foreign policies. Once a new atmosphere of toleration and tranquillity was ushered in, Italy no longer needed to apologize for its policy in Libya. However, the support that Rome lent to nationalists in the Middle East in their efforts to achieve independence could have had grave repercussions if Arab nationalism were to extend to Libya. Therefore, in the years to come, the Fascist regime sought to present Italian colonial rule as respectful and beneficial, contrasting it with the manner in which the British and French governed their colonies and mandates. Another change, which became more noticeable during the 1930s, was the increased centralization of policy, as Rome showed greater involvement in Middle Eastern affairs, and thus limited diplomats' and colonial administrators' room for manoeuvre. The growing emphasis the regime placed on propaganda further increased the dependency of diplomatic outposts on Rome. Both centralization and the employment of propaganda would reach their peak during Ciano's tenure as Foreign Minister.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Alfredo Oriani, whom Mussolini admired, spoke of Italy's need to expand and to conquer, both spiritually and materially, through emigration, treaties, trade, industry, science, art, religion, and war. While the means of expansion could vary the goal was immutable.[148] In the second half of the 1930s and in the early 1940s Fascist Italy would attempt all these methods in the Middle East.

2
In the Shadow of Ethiopia, 1935–June 1936

'Boys, the new hereditary enemy is England'
(Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane*, 1937)[1]

The conquest of Ethiopia marked an important turning point in Italy's policy towards the countries of the Middle East. In early January 1935 Mussolini reached an agreement with the French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval, reducing Italo-French tensions in Tunisia and elsewhere, and enabling the Duce to step up preparations for his move against Abyssinia.[2] However, he was unable to reach a similar understanding with London. In the years before the Ethiopian Crisis, Britain's hegemony in the Middle East was, generally, undisputed and Mussolini's revisionist policy carefully avoided posing a direct challenge to the British Empire.[3] The turn of events in the months leading up to the war and during the war itself swept aside traditional Anglo-Italian friendship. The Middle East became a central stage for the rivalry that ensued. If the adoption of an official pro-Muslim policy was the first Fascist innovation in Italy's relations with the Middle East, the overtly anti-British line assumed in the summer of 1935 was the second.

An actively hostile Middle East sitting astride Italian routes of communication with East Africa could have seriously obstructed the war effort. Therefore, the Fascist regime used diverse methods to try to enlist the support of Middle Eastern leaders and masses for its policies. This chapter will address three major questions: what were the consequences of the Anglo-Italian rivalry in the Middle East and how did it affect Italian strategic planning in the region? How did Italy attempt to enlist the support of Middle Eastern leaders and masses? And how did Middle Eastern societies view Italian policies? The chapter will also show how Italy used its pro-Muslim policy to further the conquest of Ethiopia.

The Anglo-Italian rivalry and the Middle East

The international crisis surrounding the Abyssinian question and the subsequent Italian invasion of Ethiopia on 3 October 1935 caused considerable tension between Britain and Italy in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. In the months preceding the outbreak of the war, the objectives of both countries proved incompatible: Mussolini wanted the British to give him a free hand to conquer Ethiopia, while London wanted Italy to reach a compromise with Ethiopia through diplomatic means. Given that both sides failed to comply with the other's objectives, a security dilemma developed, threatening to bring the two countries into military confrontation. Ironically, neither side actually wanted to fight the other. As the chain of events surrounding the military tension has already been thoroughly researched,[4] we will only focus on developments that affected the Middle East.

The British government strove to avert an Italo-Abyssinian war, primarily through the League of Nations. From late June until early August 1935 relations between Britain and Italy deteriorated and a negotiated settlement of the Abyssinian dispute appeared to be unreachable. On 9 August Mussolini instructed Marshal Pietro Badoglio, the Chief of the Armed Forces General Staff, to prepare at once for war with Britain. At about the same time he ordered the general staff to plan for potential operations against the British in Egypt and Sudan. General Alberto Pariani, the army's Deputy Chief of Staff, noted that 'Obviously, if they [the British] closed the Suez Canal we will have to reopen it. To this effect we will evidently have to launch an offensive from Cyrenaica.'[5] This was a significant turning point. Mussolini may have envisaged conquering Egypt and Sudan as early as March 1935,[6] or even earlier, but as far as we know, before August 1935 he never ordered the military to prepare a plan to invade either of them.

When the heads of the Italian armed forces met on 13 August a gloomy picture emerged. Air force Chief of Staff, General Giuseppe Valle, naval Chief of Staff, Admiral Domenico Cavagnari, and Badoglio himself, were all pessimistic regarding Italy's possibilities in a war with Britain. Only General Federico Baistrocchi, the head of the army, was more optimistic, based on the existing partial mobilization of the Italian army compared to the lack of British ground troops. The next day Badoglio wrote to Mussolini saying that the navy would have to be confined to maritime guerrilla warfare and 'nothing else'. The air force was equally handicapped especially considering that the British had six aircraft carriers, which constituted a base for 220 planes. In such conditions, he

concluded, the Italian advantage in the number of ground troops was irrelevant.[7]

On 22 August 1935, following the failure of the tripartite discussions in Paris earlier that month and repeated warnings from Eric Drummond, the Ambassador in Rome, regarding a possible 'mad dog' Italian attack, the British cabinet decided to adopt 'precautionary measures' in the Mediterranean.[8] Britain's Mediterranean Fleet was instructed to move quietly to Alexandria since its Malta base was vulnerable to Italian aerial attacks. It was reinforced by an aircraft carrier, two flotillas of destroyers and one submarine flotilla. The Home Fleet was instructed by the cabinet to assemble in Portland by 29 August and to proceed south to Gibraltar. Each of the five RAF squadrons in the Middle East Command was reinforced by six aircraft and six pilots. Naval and air force reinforcements were also sent to Aden. By 20 September some 120 British ships were deployed in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.[9]

Mussolini reacted by reinforcing the Italian garrison in Libya with three divisions, and sent two of them – *Assietta* and *Cosseria* – to the border with Egypt in early September.[10] On 3 September a representative of the Italian Foreign Ministry cabinet met with the Arab nationalist Ihsan Jabiri. During the conversation the Italian official mentioned the possibility of an Italian attack on Sudan. He asked Jabiri whether he could recommend 'a Muslim personality of great name and authority', who would accompany the Italian troops in order to influence the attitude of the Sudanese soldiers. Interestingly, the Foreign Ministry cabinet was warned that Jabiri was under the surveillance of the British intelligence service.[11] This raises some questions regarding Italian motives in divulging such classified information. Perhaps they wanted the British to learn of Italy's preparations in Africa so as to make Rome's military threat more potent.

The arrival of Home Fleet units in Gibraltar on 17 September caused considerable concern in Rome. Mussolini was beset on all sides by senior figures such as the Ambassador in London, Dino Grandi, Baron Pompeo Aloisi at the Foreign Ministry, Cavagnari and Badoglio from the armed services and even King Vittorio Emanuele III, who warned him against a collision with Great Britain. According to Suvich's memoirs, the Duce himself was close to losing his nerve, complaining that Britain 'wants to attack us'.[12] However, at the same time Mussolini was also receiving reassuring information that Britain was not heading for war. SIM was able to supply the Duce with documents purloined from the safe of the British embassy in Rome as well as decrypts of British naval telegrams proving Britain's lack of readiness for combat.[13] Despite his bellicose posturing in Geneva, the British Foreign Secretary

Samuel Hoare secretly agreed with the French Prime Minister, Pierre Laval, that only economic sanctions would be applied against Italy. He therefore instructed Drummond to notify Mussolini that Britain did not intend to initiate hostilities. The Duce was also aware of France's continued objection to the application of military sanctions against Italy.[14] Motivated by a desire to maintain the regime's prestige and having spent so much effort and money on preparations, Mussolini decided to push on with the invasion of Ethiopia.

The concentration of Italian troops on the Egyptian border turned out to be no more than a threat, intended to dissuade the British, who supposedly loathed land warfare, from intervening militarily and especially from closing the Suez Canal. An Italian army numbering some 56,000 men was incapable of conquering Egypt and reaching the Suez Canal.[15] Mussolini had mobilized an army more than five times this size to conquer a country which did not have the vast military resources that the British had in Egypt. In any case, Pariani's plan for an attack along the coast of the Mediterranean was set aside by October, since the Italian general staff believed that an invasion of Egypt should be carried out by a force of seven divisions with 5,940 vehicles. Balbo, the Governor of Libya, had neither.[16]

The political and military tension between Italy and Britain continued, with varying levels of intensity, throughout the Ethiopian War. In early October Grandi and Hoare discussed a *détente* in the Mediterranean, which would include the withdrawal of British battle cruisers from Gibraltar in return for a reduction in the number of Italian troops in Libya.[17] However, the *détente* failed to materialize because of mutual suspicion. Between 16 and 27 October Marshal Badoglio and Alessandro Lessona, Deputy Minister for the Colonies, were in Eritrea to examine the possibility of undertaking operations in the Sudan. Both Badoglio and Emilio De Bono, the High Commissioner for East Africa, objected to this plan. In a joint telegram to Mussolini they stated that any operations whatsoever against the Sudan 'were absolutely to be avoided.'[18]

In November several countries began to implement economic sanctions against Italy. Nonetheless, Grandi held a few meetings with Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Undersecretary at the British Foreign Office and, with the Duce's consent, tried to reach a negotiated settlement over the fate of Ethiopia. These talks led to the Hoare-Laval peace plan, which had collapsed by mid-December. Despite the on-going effort to reach a negotiated settlement, Mussolini ordered Balbo in November, and again in early December, to prepare for an attack on Egypt. Balbo's plan was examined in January 1936 in order to be ready for implementation by

March, although by that time the Governor admitted that it was not realistic. He concluded that the troops in Libya were insufficient to reach the Canal and that it would be better to concentrate on defensive measures. The other services also needed to re-orient their planning in order to prepare for a confrontation with Britain. The air force began to examine potential targets for bombardment in Egypt, Palestine, Cyprus and other parts of the eastern Mediterranean. This shift was not always met with enthusiasm; when Mussolini ordered the Ministry for the Colonies to prepare for an attack on the British protectorate in Aden, the Italian navy did its best to have the plan shelved.[19]

At the end of the war Mussolini sought to improve relations with Britain. The Duce instructed Grandi to reassure the British government that Italy was a satisfied power and that he wished to resume friendly relations. The German occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 had made Italian friendship important once again for Britain. In July sanctions against Italy were lifted and shortly afterwards the Mediterranean Fleet returned to Malta. The 'Italo-Abyssinian emergency' was over, but Anglo-Italian relations remained strained. From the summer of 1936 the Spanish Civil War replaced Ethiopia as the most dominant factor influencing Anglo-Italian relations.[20]

Justifying the invasion – Italian propaganda in the Middle East

In early October 1935, shortly after the invasion of Ethiopia, Italian youngsters were seen riding around Cairo on bicycles distributing pamphlets bearing the title 'Abyssinia and Slavery'. The pamphlets, written in Arabic and in French, attributed various atrocities to the Abyssinians and depicted them as the enemies of Egypt and of Islam.[21] These pamphlets were part of a large scale effort to justify Italy's actions in Ethiopia and to rally Arab and Muslim support to the Italian cause. During the Ethiopian Crisis the main aims of Italian propaganda in the region were to justify Italian policy in Abyssinia and elsewhere, to ridicule British conduct, and to promote Italy's prestige among the peoples of the Orient. Italian propaganda in the Middle East during this period was much more centralized and cohesive than the disparate diplomatic efforts which, as we shall see later on, were adapted to the specific circumstances of each country.

As early as March 1935 Emilio Pagliano, the Italian Minister in Cairo, wrote to Galeazzo Ciano, the Undersecretary for Press and Propaganda, that a post should be established for a person who could take charge of

all activities vis-à-vis the local press.[22] In June Ciano sent Ugo Dadone, a former employee of the Alexandria daily *Giornale d'Oriente*, to Cairo. Dadone became the director of the newly created *Agence d'Egypte et d'Orient* (AEO). This press agency was an offshoot of the Italian legation and was funded from Rome. It had correspondents in Jerusalem and Beirut and it published bulletins in French and Arabic. The agency soon became one of the hubs of Italian propaganda activities in the Middle East. The AEO, along with the Italian consulates and legations across the region, provided the local press with articles and photographic material on a wide variety of Italian-related topics for free or at very low prices.[23] Both the agency and the diplomatic posts also served as channels for passing subsidies to various local newspapers. The Italian Press and Propaganda Ministry spent an average of 70,000 Italian lire per month on 'propaganda and journalistic activity' in Egypt alone, starting from August 1935 and continuing until May 1940.[24] As Table 2.1 shows, during and after the Ethiopian War the Italian legation in Cairo funded six local newspapers appealing to Arabic, French and Greek readers. The Italians also funded at least three individual journalists.[25]

Despite this effort, pro-Italian articles provided by the legation in Cairo were published mainly by French language newspapers with limited circulation. *Al-Ahram*, the most popular daily newspaper in the Arab world, did not receive any Italian funds, despite offers by Dadone and Pellegrino Ghigi, the new Italian Minister in Cairo. According to a British report, the Italians also offered to supply articles to the daily *Jihad* and 'to meet any expenditures involved.' Nonetheless, this influential newspaper remained hostile to Italy.[26]

In April 1935 Paolo Rossi, the Italian Consul in Aleppo in northern Syria, requested funds to subsidize the local press. He was granted

Table 2.1 Italian subsidies for the Egyptian press[27]

Newspaper	**Amount per month in Egyptian pounds[28] (until August 1936)**	**Amount per month in Egyptian pounds (from September 1936)**
Al-Balagh (Cairo)	100	0
Al-Muqattam (Cairo)	65	50
La Patrie (Cairo)	50	50
Takidromos (Alexandria)	50	30
Partout (Cairo)	50	25
Le Phare Egyptien (Alexandria)	15	10
Total	**330**	**165**

5,000 lire. Casto Caruso, the Consul in Damascus, asked for 7,000 lire for the same purpose in July, and in August Ciano approved this request. Articles and photos provided by Italian representatives were published in Syrian and Lebanese papers such as *Al-Bilad*, *Les echos de Syrie* and *Al-Ayyam* throughout 1935 and the first few months of 1936.[29] The Italian representative in Baghdad complained that he had not been able to publish any of the articles sent to him, as the Iraqi press was supporting the Ethiopians. He suspected that local papers were being financed by 'anti-Italian institutions in Egypt'. In September 1935 the legation in Iraq asked for an allocation of at least £40 Sterling per month, a request that was apparently approved.[30] On 25 November 1935 Archibald Clark, the British Ambassador to Iraq, informed the Foreign Office that the Baghdad newspaper *Al-Uqāb* was 'being made an instrument of Italian propaganda' and was criticizing Britain's conduct in the Abyssinian Crisis.[31]

In addition to articles, photographs and funds, Italian representatives in the Middle East also dealt with the dissemination of pamphlets and booklets. The majority of the publications sent out from Rome during the war and its aftermath were in English and French and dealt with the Fascist regime and its achievements. Italian propaganda was conducted on a world-wide scale and the success of the Fascist regime in Italy was perceived as a common denominator which could be utilized in Buenos Aires as well as in Cairo.[32] Nonetheless, the propaganda through publications directed at the Arabic-reading population seems to have been a targeted effort. The legation in Cairo distributed publications, pamphlets and news bulletins in Arabic prepared by the *Agence d'Egypte et d'Orient*, which were apparently printed in Egypt.[33] As for printed material sent from Rome, the Italians preferred to focus on individuals in the Middle East who had shown an interest in learning more about Italy and its regime. In late January 1936 Mahmud Rais, the leader of the Blue Shirts youth movement in Alexandria, asked to receive written material on the history and achievements of the Fascist regime. Suvich instructed the Press and Propaganda Ministry to send Rais the material he requested along with publications in English and Arabic regarding the war in Ethiopia.[34] Rais was not alone. In autumn 1935 and throughout 1936 Rome sent dozens of copies of propaganda material to the Middle East. These included the pamphlet 'This is what the League of Nations does not wish to see' which was sent to Egypt and Palestine. Written in Arabic and aimed at countering Ethiopian allegations of Italian atrocities, this pamphlet included several photos of Italian doctors treating African children, corpses reportedly mutilated

by the Ethiopians, and public buildings erected by Italy for the benefit of 'the natives' in the colonies.[35]

Rome also sent films to the Middle East. In late 1935 and throughout 1936 the Press and Propaganda Ministry dispatched numerous *Luce* newsreels to Egypt, though these had an Italian narration and were intended primarily for the Italian communities there. While most were dedicated to the progress of the Italian troops in Ethiopia, some of the *Luce* newsreels included items that could have been of interest to Middle Eastern audiences, such as the agricultural development of Libya (May 1936) or the seventh Levant Fair in Bari (September 1936). However, no special effort to appeal to Arab viewers through this form of media can be discerned.[36] The main method of reaching the Arab masses, as far as Italian propaganda was concerned, was through radio broadcasts.

Radio Bari's programmes in Arabic, launched in May 1934, began to be broadcast on a daily bases in summer 1935.[37] In the months that followed, the station's transmissions took on the role of defending Italy's position on the Abyssinian question, often criticizing British policy. For example, the station drew the attention of its listeners to the way Britain was suppressing the Muslims in India. Bari also claimed that disagreements between Arab states regarding frontiers were being used by Britain to extend British control over the Middle East and that London's position on the Ethiopian question was motivated by its desire 'to add Abyssinia to her territories'.[38] On 17 October 1935 Bari announced that 'We shall open the eyes of all the Moslems throughout the world to this false, egotistical, cowardly and imperialistic policy, the British policy which holds more than three quarters of the Moslem world under its thrall.' When anti-British student demonstrations in Cairo in November 1935 turned into violent riots, Radio Bari announced that 'England has oppressed Egypt long enough. We hope the wounded [demonstrators] will rapidly recover to fight another day for their independence.'[39]

Bari's anti-British tone helped to promote the station's popularity in certain sectors of the Middle East. As a British observer commented, 'Arabs certainly listen-in to Bari if only to satisfy their feeling that they are listening-in to a people who are the enemies of the English.'[40] In his autobiography, the Palestinian author Saïd Aburish tells the story of his uncle, Muhammad, who used to bring his taxi (which had a radio receiver) to the middle of Bethany, to allow the villagers to hear the six o'clock news 'on Palestine, on Hitler and on Mussolini'. He described this as Muhammad's 'first rebellious act' against the British.[41]

Another example of Bari's popularity was provided in late August 1935 by the Armenian Archbishop of Aleppo, who asked Rossi whether Italy would also be willing to broadcast programmes in Armenian.[42] The station was quite proud of its popularity. In November 1935 it reported: 'From Haifa several of our correspondents wish to know what Italy thinks of doing supposing she succeeds in conquering the whole of Abyssinia.' It also encouraged its audience to become more involved: 'We remind our listeners that we will gladly send them copies of the Italian Memorandum [on Italy's respectful conduct in countries under its dominion] in any language.'[43]

Radio Bari had a reciprocal relationship with the Arabic press, quoting it and being quoted by it. The station cited Arab newspapers extensively, either in order to draw attention to pro-Italian and anti-British articles or in order to denounce papers that attacked Italian policy.[44] In August 1935 De Cicco in Beirut asked the Press and Propaganda Ministry to instruct Radio Bari not to mention the paper *Al-Rabita* in its broadcasts. This was an insignificant paper, he explained, which deliberately sought to quarrel with Bari and thus earn itself free publicity. He recommended that during the Arabic programme only the newspapers whose attitude towards Italy was favourable should be mentioned, consequently encouraging the local press to adopt a more pro-Italian approach.[45]

While the station's main target for attacks was Britain, Bari's broadcasters had no qualms about inciting the Arabs in Palestine against their Jewish neighbours:

> Jaffa – Arab milieux are very excited over the incident of contraband arms discovered in Palestine […] despatched by an Antwerp firm to a Jewish commercial firm in Palestine destined for Abyssinia. […] Arab circles are asking how the English authorities can permit such a thing […] How they permit smugglers of arms to live in Palestine? Why is no action taken against these murderers […] when such arms are being used to kill Arab soldiers in Eritrea?[46]

The station then went on to mention a letter of protest submitted by 'the great Arab leader [Raghib] Nashashibi' to the High Commissioner following the incident. According to Radio Bari, the letter complained 'that the Arabs there [in Palestine] are the victims of the Jews who wish to become the sole masters of the Palestinian territory'. This method of quoting selectively from local sources enabled the station to transmit items, which would have been popular with its Arab listeners, without making statements that might bind the Italian government.

No study of Italian policy in the Middle East during the Ethiopia War can fail to mention Shakib Arslan's articles in the Arab press justifying Italian policy. Contemporaries and historians alike have often described Arslan as an organ of Italian propaganda. It is true that he received money from the Italians, and from 1934 he refrained from attacking Mussolini and his policies. However, in most cases Arslan only published articles praising Italy or calling on Arabs to support Mussolini's policies when it suited his own agenda. In March 1935, for instance, Arslan denounced the way in which the Abyssinians had treated his coreligionists: 'apart from the Muslims of Spain no other Muslim people have suffered over the centuries such atrocities as the Muslims of Ethiopia.'[47]

Arslan's line of argument certainly served Italian interests. The pro-Muslim policy that Rome had adopted during 1933–4 was used not only in order to further relations with Middle Eastern countries but also to raise support for Italy in East Africa. During the preparations before the war, the Italians were hoping to play on the ancient rivalry between Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia in order to weaken the position of the Negus.[48] Arslan, who had visited East Africa in 1934, sent Dr Enderle, his liaison with the Palazzo Chigi, a report on the situation of the Muslims in Ethiopia in February 1935. Based on letters sent to Arslan by Ethiopian Muslims, the report presented a gloomy picture. The Muslim communities lacked cohesion and leadership and their level of education and religious awareness was very low. The report went on to say that Muslims were excluded from public offices and from holding positions in the country's administration for two reasons: 'the religious fanaticism of the [Christian] rulers and the low intellectual level of the Muslims'. Enderle commented on the report, which was sent to the Foreign Ministry in Rome, that it 'could be used if and when it would become necessary to create disagreements between Copts and Muslims in Ethiopia.'[49] Italian attempts to enlist the support of various Muslim communities in Ethiopia were part of a much larger effort to undermine Ethiopia's defences.[50] Moreover, as war drew nearer the Fascist regime used Ethiopia's maltreatment of its Muslim communities on the international scene, to justify Italy's 'civilizing mission' and to raise support for Italian policy among the Muslims of the Middle East.

Quite apart from his secret contacts with the Italians, Arslan was a zealot when it came to his good name and reputation. In February 1936 he published an article, which was quoted in the Egyptian and Syrian press, denying allegations that he had written pamphlets scattered by the Italians forces in Ethiopia. He insisted that his sole concern in

Ethiopia was obtaining fair treatment for the Muslims there. In May the Syrian *Fata al-Arab* published an article by Arslan in which he defended his position regarding the war in Ethiopia. Mussolini, he wrote, was a friend of his even before he rose to power. Furthermore, Arslan credited himself with bringing about the change in Italian policy in Libya. Similar arguments were repeated in a series of articles written by Arslan in August and published in the Syrian *Al-Kabas*, the Egyptian *Kawkab al-Sharq* and in a special issue of *La Nation Arabe*.[51]

The Italian Foreign Ministry ascribed great importance to Arslan. Quite a few of the reports regarding his articles and activities were shown to Mussolini. In May 1936 an Italian official met with Arslan in Geneva and reported that the Amir was very satisfied with Italy's success in Ethiopia. He recommended that Italy should calm Arab anxieties by issuing a statement that it had no expansionist desires in the Middle East. He also stressed the importance of developing a pro-Muslim policy in Ethiopia. The Italian official informed Arslan that since the conquest the use of Arabic in Harar, the centre of Islam in Ethiopia, had already been 'restored' and that the mosques there would soon be rebuilt.[52] Indeed, following the Italian victory, Mussolini gave orders for a mosque to be built in Addis Ababa as a show of gratitude for the Muslims' support during the conquest – towards the end of the war some 35,000 Ethiopian Muslims volunteered to fight against the army of Haile Selassie. Already in May 1936 Italian agents in Yemen distributed leaflets in Arabic promising that the conquest of Ethiopia 'opened a new era of freedom and progress for the Muslim population there, who were, until now, kept in a state of inferiority by the predominant Copt element'.[53] This was a prelude to a pro-Muslim policy that would last throughout most of Italy's rule over Ethiopia and which, in turn, was harnessed to promote Italy's prestige in the Middle East.

The fact that the Italians were willing to invest time and resources on propaganda in the Middle East proves that public opinion in this region was important to them. This large-scale effort also reflects the growing importance within the Fascist regime of the Office for Press and Propaganda which grew from an Under-secretariat to a Ministry in June 1935. Wartime propaganda set the tone for the years to follow. Throughout 1936 and 1937 the apparatus in Rome continued to produce large quantities of material, making use of more or less the same themes that were introduced during the Ethiopian Crisis. Let us turn now to Italy's policies vis-à-vis individual countries and to the impact these had on Middle Eastern societies.

Egypt and the Italian hiding under the bed

The rivalry between Britain and Italy had an immense effect on the Middle East. This was especially true for Egypt where the Ethiopian War had several repercussions. Let us first of all examine Anglo-Italian relations in this country. Sir Miles Lampson, the British High Commissioner for Egypt, and Pellegrino Ghigi, the Italian Minister in Cairo, echoed and at times magnified the concerns of their superiors in London and Rome. The two men first met on 7 October 1935, only a few days after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Although Lampson found Ghigi to be a 'pleasant young man' he complained about anti-British propaganda emanating from Radio Bari and other Italian sources, as well as alleged payments made by Italians to newspapers and political movements in Egypt. Ghigi rebutted the accusations: Italy was not carrying out anti-British propaganda in Egypt, nor was it subsidizing any of the local press or political groups. He categorically denied reports to this effect in the British press. Given the situation in Ethiopia, he explained that Italy had to present its case to the public. However, the Italian press had not attacked Britain, nor had it discussed Anglo-Egyptian relations. It had only dealt with Italian relations with Egypt, Italian relations with Ethiopia and Egyptian relations with Ethiopia. Furthermore, Ghigi complained that British officials in Egypt were behind attacks against Italy in the local press. Lampson, in turn, denied Italian reports claiming that Sanusi exiles in Egypt were receiving money from the British residency, as well as claims that the British were backing an anti-Italian campaign in the local press.[54]

Lampson was extremely apprehensive about the broadcasts of Radio Bari. He advocated an aggressive approach to counter what he perceived as a threat to British interests in the region. On 13 November 1935 the RAF conducted interference tests on frequency 1059 kc/s by emitting 'damp waves' from Heliopolis. Consequently, the reception of Radio Bari's evening broadcasts (between 20:00 and 20:35) in Cairo became 'indistinguishable'. Nevertheless, the British government decided not to continue with this course of action. Firstly, such activity was contrary to the 1932 International Telecommunication Convention of Madrid and secondly, British broadcasting and maritime wireless communications were vulnerable to Italian retaliation.[55]

Meanwhile, Ghigi complained to Rome of British anti-Italian propaganda and of insinuations in the local press that Italy sought to escalate the anti-British demonstrations, which had broken out in Cairo in mid-November, by promising to supply the rioting Egyptian students

with arms.[56] This allegation had even reached the House of Commons. In January 1936 the *Sunday Chronicle* went as far as publishing a full page article claiming that Italy had been the driving force behind the recent riots. In response to this, Suvich circulated to several Italian ministries and embassies Ghigi's passionate denials of all the recent accusations. Italy had not distributed any anti-British pamphlets in Egypt, nor did Italian officials have any connection to the Egyptian students' demonstrations. He claimed that both the Italian communities and the Italian press in Egypt had been maintaining a very calm attitude, despite attacks by the *Egyptian Gazette* and the *Egyptian Mail*. The mutual accusations between Ghigi and Lampson continued well into 1936. The British High Commissioner complained of broadcasts from Bari, in which it was alleged that British officers had been fighting alongside the Ethiopians against Italy. Ghigi protested against the anti-Italian atmosphere in the British press and among some of the British residents in Egypt.[57]

Lampson's concerns over Italian designs in Egypt found a sympathetic ear with Britain's new Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden.[58] In April 1936 the latter asked the cabinet to consider 'the effect of the Italian success on the United Kingdom and British prestige generally', adding that 'sections of public opinion in Egypt had been impressed by the forceful action of the Italians.' 'Our prestige was bound to suffer and had already suffered from these events', he concluded. In June of that year Eden submitted a memorandum to the cabinet stating that 'There is no doubt that Signor Mussolini's recent success has considerably impressed at our expense the timorous and receptive Egyptian public.'[59]

Following the invasion of Ethiopia many in Britain were apprehensive about Mussolini's future plans in north-east Africa. These concerns even found their way into popular literature. In Agatha Christie's *Death on the Nile*, first published in 1937, the seemingly innocent archaeologist signor Richetti, travelling on the same boat as Hercule Poirot, turns out to be a dangerous Italian spy, 'one of the cleverest paid agitators that ever existed'.[60] This example might shed some light on the extent of British suspicion regarding Italian activities in Egypt during the 1930s. In fact, the argument surrounding the seriousness of the Italian threat in the region spilled over into contemporary research. A number of historians writing in English have observed that the Ethiopian Crisis had a profound influence on British strategic thinking regarding the Middle East.[61] On the other hand, in Italian historiography the British tendency to link Italy with every anti-British manifestation in the Middle East has often been described as an 'Italian under the bed

syndrome' (*psicosi dell'italiano sotto il letto*). Renzo De Felice went as far as saying that this 'psychosis' had 'infected' (*contagiato*) the historiography which is based on British sources from the 1930s.[62] As the next section will show, the Fascist regime was less innocent than the reports sent from Egypt by Ghigi might suggest. True, in some cases allegations of Italian involvement were false; Italy did not promise to provide arms for the Egyptian students during the demonstrations in Cairo in autumn 1935. However, the tension between London and Rome did expose the anti-British aspects of Italy's new policy towards the Arab and Muslim world.

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The Ethiopian Crisis and the subsequent war had a tremendous impact on Italo-Egyptian relations. Throughout most of 1935 and 1936, the Fascist regime sought to maintain a positive Egyptian attitude towards Italy and to dissuade local support for Ethiopia. This was done through a combination of assurances and intimidation. Italy also attempted to drive a wedge between the Egyptians and the British.

In late April 1935 a mission of Ethiopian delegates reached Egypt to negotiate a treaty of friendship between the two countries. Mussolini wanted to obstruct Haile Selassie's attempts to befriend the Muslim and Arab world. He instructed the Italian legation in Cairo to notify the Egyptian government that if it were to sign such a treaty with Ethiopia this would be considered 'as an unfriendly act towards Italy'. By 29 April the Ethiopian mission was preparing to return home without receiving anything from the Egyptian government, either because of the Italian threat or because of internal considerations. Upon learning of this, Suvich instructed the Italian Minister in Cairo to inform the Egyptian King of Mussolini's satisfaction.[63]

In September 1935 Mussolini wanted to reassure the Egyptian government that the military build up on the Libyan border was not intended to threaten Egypt. He instructed Ghigi to 'Find a way to notify the King and the Ministers that this is a precautionary measure which does not have, nor wishes to have, any anti-Egyptian character or objective.'[64] When the Egyptian government decided to apply sanctions against Italy in early November 1935, despite not being a member of the League of Nations, Rome reacted with a harsh response. Mussolini instructed Ghigi to submit a formal complaint to the Egyptian government, arguing that, as it was not a member of the League, Egypt was under no obligation to implement sanctions and was the only non-member

to do so. He warned that the Egyptian decision would force Italy to adopt 'measures of retaliation'. Furthermore, this act proved the total dependence of Egypt upon Britain. Echoing the official Italian response, Radio Bari attacked the Egyptian cabinet for being 'so weak that it could hardly do anything else than agree with England.' London, Bari argued, 'has taken advantage of the weakness of the present cabinet to make Egypt a British colony.'[65] This response sought to intimidate the Egyptian government from implementing sanctions and also to pull Egypt away from the British-led anti-Italian bloc. However, as a result of Mussolini's policies, the Egyptians and the British sat down to resolve their differences.

The Ethiopian Crisis acted as a catalyst for Egyptian independence. As early as July 1935 Lampson pointed out that the only positive outcome of an Italian conquest of Ethiopia and the resulting 'Egyptian nervousness' would be to 'lead public opinion … in this country to welcome some more extensive and clearly defined form of British control over Egypt.'[66] This prediction proved correct. Within a few months preparations were under way for talks to settle Anglo-Egyptian relations through a treaty. Both the Egyptians and the British hoped to use the international situation as leverage during negotiations. In January 1936 Hafiz Ramadan, the President of the Egyptian National Party, wrote to Mussolini and asked him whether he could deny that Italy posed a threat to Egypt. He also inquired whether Italy would still be interested in maintaining the special rights enjoyed by Italians in Egypt under the regime of the capitulations, if the British were to forego theirs. Regarding the first point, Mussolini instructed Ghigi to tell Ramadan and other political leaders in Egypt that 'it is false, in the most absolute way that the Italian government intends to attack or somehow to threaten Egypt'. He gave assurances that the measures which were taken in Libya were strictly defensive, adding that 'I have already declared in the most formal manner that Italy will not, on her part, do anything to degenerate the Italo-Abyssinian conflict into a wider conflict.' Regarding the second point, Mussolini stated that Italy did not ask for itself greater rights in Egypt than those awarded to other nations. It sought only frank and cordial relations with the Egyptian people and their government. On Ramadan's request, Mussolini gave his approval for having his assurances published in the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*. Ramadan wanted to use this to strengthen Egypt's position in the negotiations with Britain on military matters.[67]

On 13 February the former Egyptian Prime Minister, Ismail Sidki, met with a member of the Italian legation in Cairo and discussed with

him the possibility of issuing a formal public declaration stating that Italy had no present or future intention of conquering or colonizing Egypt. Furthermore, he asked Italy to declare that it was prepared to reach an agreement with Egypt to ensure peace on the Egyptian-Libyan frontier.[68] Sidki reportedly told members of the Egyptian delegation to the talks with Britain that an Italo-Egyptian pact 'would cut the ground from beneath the feet of the British negotiators and make it difficult for them to maintain their present military demands, which were largely based on requirements for the defence of Egypt against Italy.'[69] The British, on their part, also hoped to gain from the new strategic situation. On 3 February 1936 *The Daily Telegraph* published an article titled 'Bulwark of Egypt's independence'. It argued that 'The Egyptian military situation has of course been entirely transformed by the presence of powerful Italian forces on the Libyan border, forces which bear no relation to those required by the preservation of internal order.' The paper expressed the hope that this state of affairs would persuade Egyptian nationalists to diminish their opposition to the presence of British troops.[70]

The Italian threat loomed over the Anglo-Egyptian treaty negotiations that were resumed in spring 1936 after a suspension of six years. Once the talks began, the British felt bound to reach an agreement, lest their breakdown be followed by a violent public reaction and the Arabs turning towards Italy.[71] In early April, following the capture of Lake Tsana by Italian forces and with victory in Ethiopia close at hand, Mussolini sought once again to soothe Egyptian fears. On 7 April he instructed the legation in Cairo to repeat a reassuring statement made by Grandi in London, regarding Italy's respect for international agreements on the waters of Lake Tsana and the Blue Nile. To this the Duce added that he desired to continue in the future his policy of peace, collaboration and sincere friendship with Egypt and that he respected Egyptian interests.[72] A day later Mussolini instructed Ghigi to give emphasis in local circles to the declaration made by Suvich to the Egyptian Chargé d'Affaires in Rome. The declaration, which was similar to the one Sidki had requested in February, stated that it was absurd to maintain that the Italian government intended to somehow threaten Egypt. 'Italy does not have nor will it ever have in the future intentions to conquer or colonize Egypt.' The common border with Libya should not be a cause for concern. Italy was always ready to forge with Egypt treaties of assurance to maintain peace on the frontier, and besides, Italian policy had always been motivated by a feeling of real friendship.[73] The Italians were aware of the British anxiety lest the talks break down. They also received

information on Egyptian intentions to resume violent actions if that were to happen. Mussolini may have wished to reassure the Egyptians regarding Italy's intentions in order to precipitate a breakdown in the talks.[74] However, despite Mussolini's assurances and possibly his intentions, Eden informed the British cabinet in June 1936 that the Egyptian Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Nahhas Pasha, 'appears to have made striking progress of goodwill and good sense since 1930; and it is probable that this is largely due to the Egyptian apprehension – formerly non-existent – of the Italian dangers on two borders'.[75] As the next section shows, the Egyptians were more convinced by Italy's brutality in Ethiopia than by Mussolini's assurances and propaganda.

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As recent studies have shown, the majority of the leading intellectuals in Egypt and practically all the major newspapers in the country denounced Italy's venture in Ethiopia as colonialist, expansionist and an unwarranted attack on the last independent African state.[76] The invasion of Ethiopia created a consensus between people as far apart politically as Hasan al-Banna, the leader of the religious Muslim Brotherhood, and the radical socialist intellectual, Salama Musa, who was appalled by the way the Italians had bombed civilians. The war also brought about a change in the position of the popular dailies *Al-Muqattam* and *Al-Ahram*. *Al-Muqattam* was one of the newspapers regularly receiving money from the Italians. In the early 1930s the paper showed moderate support towards Italy and Fascism and in the first months of 1935 it described the Italian demands from Ethiopia as legitimate and was calling on the two countries to reach a peaceful solution. Indeed both papers maintained a neutral position during the first half of 1935, publishing articles representing both the Italian and the Ethiopian points of view. However, following the invasion the papers adopted a critical attitude towards Italy. For example, in January and February 1936 *Al-Muqattam* severely criticized Italy for bombing Ethiopian civilian hospitals in which Egyptian volunteers were serving and for using poison gas. The paper called on the Egyptian government to prepare the local population for a similar type of war. During the same months *Al-Ahram* asserted that Italy's savagery and disrespect for international law have made it an isolated state, fighting against the whole world.[77]

Some sectors of the Egyptian public went beyond verbal condemnation. In early 1935 Abdul Hamid Said and other leaders of the Association of Young Muslims established a 'Committee for the Defence

of Ethiopia', which was eventually headed by Prince Umar Tusun. The Committee was joined by non-Muslims, including the Coptic Patriarch and a few prominent Jews. It supervised the enlistment of volunteers who wanted to fight alongside the Abyssinians. Some of these volunteers participated in the war on the Harar front, led by two ex-Ottoman generals. The Committee also raised contributions for an 'Ethiopian Fund' that financed the transportation of three Red Crescent medical teams to the battlefield.[78]

However, public opinion in Egypt was not unanimous and some differing views can be discerned. In November 1935 Yusuf Ahmad, a teacher and a former inspector in the government's archaeology department, published a book called *Islam and Ethiopia*. It was a harsh condemnation of Ethiopia and a clear call for its destruction in the name of Islam. Ahmad described Ethiopia's major sins against Islam in general and towards Ethiopian Muslims in particular. He surveyed, in a somewhat unbalanced manner, the Islamic policies of Haile Selassie and previous emperors, making an effort to depict Ethiopia as the worst enemy of Islam and as deserving a good lesson from Mussolini. In the months following its publication *Al-Balagh* and *Ruz al-Yusuf* published entire chapters of the book while a very favourable review appeared in the prestigious monthly magazine *Al-Hilal*. In early 1936 Sheikh Muhammad Num Bakr, a native of Somalia who taught at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, published a book titled *Italy and her Colonies* which described Mussolini as a champion and a saviour of Islam in Libya, and hoped that Ethiopia would enjoy a similar fate. Also in Cairo, the Lebanese Christian journalist Bulus Masad published *Ethiopia or Abyssinia in a Turning Point in Her History*, depicting Ethiopia as a barbaric country, though not using the Islamist terms employed by Yusuf Ahmad and Num Bakr. Echoing Italian propaganda, he described Ethiopia as a house of slavery. While all three writers were probably subsidized by the Italian legation in Cairo, there was a market for such books in Egypt and their publication did not go unnoticed.[79]

Italian sources, often overlooked by historians of the Middle East, shed new light on the position of the ultra-nationalist Young Egypt movement during the Ethiopian Crisis. Officially, Young Egypt and its leader, Ahmad Husayn, warned the Egyptian public against the Italian danger, its colonial aims and the threat it posed to Egypt. This criticism nearly brought Husayn to court on charges of slander. However, despite his sympathy for the soon to be oppressed Ethiopians, Husayn urged his countrymen to remain neutral in the war for fear that Britain might seize the opportunity to strengthen its hold on Egypt.[80] Away from the public light, one of the 'influential'

members of the movement had a meeting with an official of the Italian legation in late September 1935, seemingly with the consent of Ahmad Husayn. The Italians were given to understand that the movement could be induced to improve its attitude towards Italy, owing to the fact that Rome was the only possible external source of assistance when it came to fighting against British oppression.[81] In January 1936 Husayn was in Britain. During a public meeting his aides circulated a pamphlet bearing the title: 'Egypt and Great Britain – What Young Egypt has to say to British Public Opinion'. In a section dedicated to 'Britain and Italy', the pamphlet described the massive Italian superiority in land troops and emphasized Britain's need of Egyptian assistance. 'Egypt is not likely to remain neutral with a war waging inside her boundaries. She will be forced to take sides, and her decision will be inspired by her relation with Britain', it warned.[82] This Machiavellian approach suggests that Husayn's seemingly dramatic transformation into a supporter of the Axis in 1938–9 may have had deeper roots.[83]

There was one sector in Egypt that backed Italy's policy wholeheartedly – the communities of Italian nationals in Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said and Suez. Mussolini wanted to use the enthusiasm of these communities for propaganda purposes, seeking to prove that all Italians – both in the motherland and abroad – supported Italy's policy vis-à-vis Ethiopia. 'We want disciplined but enthusiastic manifestations by Italians in Egypt when our ships go through on their way to East Africa', he instructed the Italian representatives in Egypt.[84] Articles and photographs showing Italians in Port Said cheering the ships that passed through the Canal with soldiers and Black Shirts on their way to Eritrea were given ample publicity in the pages of the local Italian-language paper *Giornale d'Oriente* throughout the summer of 1935.[85]

Some members of the Italian community in Egypt offered to volunteer for service in the Italian armed forces in East Africa, while others were recruited for various espionage activities in Egypt. Rome instructed the Italian representatives in Port Said and Suez to use 'Italian subjects who are entirely trustworthy and reliable' to establish an intelligence service in the Canal Zone.[86] Enrico Bertelli, a former employee at the Anglo-Egyptian Oil Fields refinery at Suez, served as an informant for Italian Naval Intelligence from August to December 1935. He studied vulnerable points in the Canal Zone for future acts of sabotage, compiled lists of British troops deployed in Egypt and Palestine, took photos of camps and airfields, and gathered information about the Marconi station in Egypt.[87] Lieutenant-Colonel Ugo Butta, working under cover as a professor of anthropology, oversaw a network of Italian and

Arab agents. Ugo Dadone, the Director of AEO, collaborated with a service for the interception of British army and naval communications established by SIM. Dadone also reportedly conducted reconnaissance patrols, sometimes at night, in the vicinity of Mersa Matruh and Wadi Natrun.[88]

The ultra nationalistic attitude of some of the Italians in Egypt occasionally proved to be a source of embarrassment rather than pride. When the ship which carried Ciano along with Mussolini's sons, Bruno and Vittorio, passed through the Suez Canal en route to East Africa in late August 1935, thousands of Italians gathered in Port Said. During this show of support, a few Italians in black shirts attacked and injured a young Arab, evoking widespread condemnation in the local press.[89] On 29 May 1936 when the ship carrying Marshal Badoglio back to Italy passed through Port Said, a considerable number of Italians met the ship, greeting it with shouts of '*Egitto a noi*'. The Italian Minister, Ghigi, apologized to Egyptian authorities and instructed Conti, the Consul in Port Said, to find those responsible. He also implored Rome to prevent soldiers returning on boats passing through the Canal from encouraging the repetition of such manifestations.[90]

Odello of Arabia

By the mid-1930s the Fascist regime recognized the political importance of Ibn Saud as perhaps the most prominent Arab leader in the region. Formal relations between the Saudi government and Italy during the first half of 1935 were relatively good. In March 1935 ten Saudi pilots were sent to train in Italian air force schools, with the Italian government sustaining most of the costs of their tuition.[91] Later that month the Italian representative in Jeddah met with Ibn Saud and expressed Italy's concern over the expected arrival of an Ethiopian mission, seeking to reach a treaty of friendship with the Saudis. In April the King turned down the Abyssinian overture, much to the Italians' satisfaction, and in May the Saudi Crown Prince and Fuad Hamza, the Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, visited Italy.[92]

A Lebanese Druze by origin, Hamza, like his countryman Shakib Arslan, had become an orthodox Muslim and was a member of the pan-Arab Syrian-Palestinian Congress. Having visited Rome twice before, in 1932 and 1934, Hamza was Italy's greatest supporter in the Saudi court.[93] When he met with Mussolini on 22 May 1935, Hamza told the Duce that the Saudis intended to rely on Italy in order to obtain some of their aspirations. He asked whether, after the dispute with Ethiopia was resolved

one way or another, they could count on greater assistance from Italy with the supply of arms, industrial products and financial aid. Mussolini replied in the affirmative. Hamza also asked if Italy could help to improve the position of the Arabs in Palestine and to further the independence of Syria. Six months later, the Italians appear to have given Hamza £5,000.[94] It is not clear from the available sources whether the Italians were hoping to have Hamza influence Ibn Saud into adopting a pro-Italian policy or whether he was expected to distribute the money in Syria, Palestine and Transjordan to promote pan-Arabism (and anti-British sentiments). However, as events unfolded, the Italian reliance on Hamza turned out to be ineffectual.

The preparations for the war in Ethiopia put a strain on Italo-Saudi relations. At the head of Italian forces in East Africa, De Bono realized that in some areas, due to the rough terrain, the direct supply of troops could not be effected save by means of pack-animals.[95] Of these, camels were scarce in Eritrea and had to be imported. Consequently, De Bono attempted to obtain several thousand camels from Saudi Arabia. On 24 March 1935 Lieutenant-Colonel Domenico Odello, a SIM agent, arrived in Jeddah. Accompanied by his wife and their daughter, he presented himself as a private businessman, representing various Italian commercial firms. The Italian Chargé d'Affaires in Jeddah, Giovanni Persico, later complained that when Odello arrived he had no knowledge of the Arabs' language, religion or traditions.[96] Nevertheless, for a few months Odello and Persico were able to cooperate. Odello quickly established contacts with the local elite in Jeddah, as well as with Yusuf Yasin, one of the King's senior advisers. In July Odello discussed with Yasin the barter of various weapons in return for 12,000 camels for the Italian army in Eritrea. On the other side of the Red Sea, De Bono was eager to receive the camels during the first half of September. He was worried that, if delayed, the exchange might be disturbed by the British once hostilities broke out. On 2 August 1935 De Bono wrote to the War Ministry asking for the arms Odello had offered the Saudis to be delivered as soon as possible.[97] Meanwhile Ibn Saud remained cautious, initially authorizing Odello to purchase only 300 camels per month. The King was anxious regarding Italy's long-term goals in the Arabian Peninsula. He sought to maintain good relations with Mussolini, without alienating the British. Throughout the early summer of 1935 the Saudis tried to understand Britain's position in the Italo-Ethiopian dispute, but since the British were themselves unsure, Ibn Saud got no clear message. Eventually, Yasin induced the King to meet with Odello in Riyadh on 20 August.[98]

Odello used the opportunity to surprise Ibn Saud by going far beyond discussing the exchange of camels for arms. On his own initiative he offered to prepare a plan for the complete reorganization of the Saudi army based on modern criteria. Italy, he said, had an interest in strengthening the Saudi army to allow it to resist any British dictates. The Italians would therefore be willing to arm and train Ibn Saud's troops. Back in Jeddah, Odello told Persico that Ibn Saud had asked him to prepare a plan for the modernization of his armed forces. Odello later promised General Mario Roatta, the head of SIM, that the Saudi King was willing to sign an essentially anti-British treaty of alliance with Italy and that Ibn Saud would make him his Chief of Staff.[99] As we shall see, Odello's report about Ibn Saud's willingness to rely on and be armed by Italy was completely unfounded. On 25 August, the King ordered Yasin to inform the British about the camel transaction and to ask for their consent. He said he would cancel the enterprise should the British desire it, but if the conflict was only between Italy and Ethiopia the Saudi government would follow its neutral policy and continue trading with the Italians. The British response was reassuring; their advice to Ibn Saud was to continue being polite to Mussolini and not to worry about the camel transaction. As for Ethiopia, they told the Saudis that their 'opposition is not so much to Italian aims as to Italian methods'.[100]

Meanwhile Odello informed De Bono that the Saudis were 'urgently' interested in seeing some samples of various arms. The latter forwarded this request to the War Ministry.[101] On 15 September 1935 Persico wrote to Mussolini imploring him to hasten the delivery of the samples. 'I fear … that Ibn Saud might have a bad impression from our difficulties with sending him samples, while he does not hesitate to temporarily weaken himself [by] sending to Eritrea some of his military camels with a kind and friendly gesture.' Two days later Mussolini ordered De Bono to 'Send immediately the samples of arms requested by the Saudis, it is urgent, do not lose time.' At about the same time Mussolini exchanged letters of friendship with Ibn Saud.[102] On 20 September 1935 the High Command of *Africa Orientale* drafted a 32-page agreement for the exchange of camels for arms. In early October an Italian ship brought a consignment of arms to Jeddah, which included a fast light tank (carro veloce 33), a four-barrelled anti-aircraft gun and other weapons. A party of nine Italian soldiers accompanying the consignment, disguised as employees and mechanics of the firms Fiat and Breda, was permitted to come ashore. The consignment remained in the Jeddah customs for a few weeks and was joined by a Fiat motor truck and a trailer, which arrived from Massawa a few days later. By this stage,

De Bono had become very anxious regarding the outcome of the deal. In mid-October he wrote to both the War Ministry and the Ministry for the Colonies, criticizing Odello's indiscreet behaviour and complaining that 'the negotiations for the camels with the Saudis have definitely failed … until now I have not received a single camel'.[103]

Finally, on 26 October the arms consignment was removed from the Jeddah customs and a few days later the Italians staged a weapons demonstration for the benefit of several Saudi officials. According to British reports, the Saudis were impressed by some of the weapons they were shown. Nonetheless, the barter of 12,000 camels for Italian arms failed to materialize, owing to the decision of the Saudi King who had been very suspicious of the Italian 'merchant' since his arrival. In October Odello had an argument with Yasin, after which the Saudi official refused to meet him, unless he was accompanied by Persico. Yasin justly suspected that Odello had given inaccurate reports to Rome regarding the schedule of the transaction. In November Fuad Hamza told Persico that he 'would not like to enter into commercial transactions with private individuals'.[104] In fact, Ibn Saud wished to separate the offer of Italian arms from the camel transaction, for which he preferred to receive money. He therefore instructed his Minister of Finance, Abdullah Sulayman, to arrange for the sale of 1,000 camels. On 20 November the camels – paid for in advance by Odello – were transferred by an Italian steamship from the port of Yanbu. In his memoirs, De Bono mentioned obtaining 'a certain number' of camels from the Saudis. 'After some little delay', he commented 'we finally had a good and plentiful supply of camels, which were of immense service to the Intendancy'.[105]

But the affair did not end there. In early January 1936 the Italians learnt of Ibn Saud's desire that the samples of arms remain in Arabia as a gift. Eager to improve relations with the Saudis, the Italian Foreign Ministry did not object to giving away these arms, 'independently of the known question relating to the supply of camels'.[106] The weapons were therefore given to the Saudis free of charge, while the Fiat truck was sold to the municipality of Mecca as a refuse vehicle. When Odello wrote to Ibn Saud, repeating his offer to form an anti-British alliance and to have himself placed at the head of the Saudi army, the King had Hamza show the letter to Persico, expressing his disapproval. Subsequently, Odello left Saudi Arabia on 28 January. Both he and Persico were summoned to the Foreign Ministry. In the reports they submitted, they blamed each other for the failure of the deal. In May 1936, when the Foreign Ministry concluded its enquiry, Persico's point of view had prevailed.

Odello, the final report stated, had overstepped his authority by making political offers to the Saudis. Ibn Saud could not understand why the Italians were using unofficial channels to make such offers.[107]

In retrospect it seems that Odello was playing both sides, promising the Saudis more than he could give and demanding from the Italians more than the Saudis had asked for. One suspects that he was hoping to emulate the feats of T. E. Lawrence. Odello's discharge in the spring of 1936 might serve to prove the general dissatisfaction surrounding his conduct. The fact that a relatively high ranking SIM officer functioned so poorly illustrates how ill-prepared the organization was, at this stage, to carry out delicate missions in the Middle East. While an official request by the Italian government to purchase camels would not necessarily have changed the outcome, it could have prevented Ibn Saud from getting a bad impression of the way Italy chose to conduct its affairs. Two years later, in the spring of 1938, Odello's mission was still perceived by the Italians as one of the sources of Ibn Saud's mistrust towards Italy.[108]

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Officially, the Saudi government observed a strict policy of neutrality during the Italian-Ethiopian War and did not implement sanctions against Italy. The Saudi Kingdom, like Egypt, was not a member of the League of Nations and was not obligated to impose sanctions. According to a British report, Italy's strong protest to the Egyptian government, following its decision to implement sanctions, made an impression on Fuad Hamza. On 28 January 1936 the Saudis explained in a note to the League of Nations that their position as a Muslim power and custodian of the Holy Places made it incumbent on them to maintain friendly relations with all powers having Muslim subjects. The Saudi decision not to take part in the sanctions was met with much satisfaction in Rome.[109] In practice the Saudi government not only traded with the Italians in East Africa but also effectively turned down two Ethiopian missions (one in the spring of 1935 and another in the autumn of that year).[110]

However, the conquest of Ethiopia and the strengthening of Italy's status as a Red Sea power were causes for concern for Ibn Saud. At an early stage of the conflict the Saudi King inquired whether the British government would guarantee to assist him if he were openly to side against Italy and as a result his country was attacked. The British could not give Ibn Saud the guarantees he requested, for fear of violating their

commitment to the 1927 Rome Agreement. The Foreign Office later acknowledged that this was the reason why 'Ibn Saud has gone as far as he has in "keeping in" with the Italians'.[111] Unaware of Saudi apprehensions, the Italians continued to court Ibn Saud. In April 1936 Persico returned to the Saudi Kingdom and was received for an interview by the King on 10 May. Acting on Suvich's instructions, Persico informed Ibn Saud that the Ethiopian population, particularly the Muslims, was delighted at their liberation from the yoke of their Shoan conquerors. They welcomed the Italian troops and joined them voluntarily in fighting their former oppressors. Moreover, in the occupied territories the Italian forces respected the religious freedom of all the locals.[112] The Italians also attempted to bolster their position in the Saudi Kingdom by expanding Italo-Saudi collaboration in the field of aviation. In September 1935 the King had conveyed his desire to obtain airplanes and, as Italian officials felt that it was necessary to restore Ibn Saud's confidence in Italy following the Odello fiasco, the Fascist government gave Ibn Saud three Caproni aircraft as a gift in the spring of 1936 and sent a group of airmen to the Saudi Kingdom to serve as instructors.[113]

Contrary to Suvich's hopes, the conquest of Ethiopia only increased Ibn Saud's suspicion towards Italy. Italian presents aside, the King took practical steps to safeguard his country. In April 1936 a treaty of alliance was signed between Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The treaty included an article of mutual defence against a possible aggression by a third party. According to Yehoshua Porath, one of the factors that induced the Saudis to form such an alliance was the potential Italian threat against the kingdom, in light of the conquest of Ethiopia.[114] In May Yusuf Yasin told the British Minister, Andrew Ryan, that the King was worried about Italian policy in the Red Sea and possible Italian aggression against Yemen. In November 1936 George Rendel, the head of the Middle Eastern Department at the Foreign Office, visited the Arabian Peninsula. He reported that 'Ibn Saud was very uneasy about Italian propaganda in Arabia in general and about Italian intentions in Yemen in particular.' The King was worried about Italian agents who were 'active in the Yemen' and was anxious 'to come to some understanding with His Majesty's Government about the situation'.[115] The Ethiopian War saw the emergence of a pattern in Saudi foreign policy which would continue until the outbreak of the Second World War: Ibn Saud would manoeuvre between Britain and Italy – only to add Germany to the equation later on.

Estimating the inclinations of Saudi public opinion regarding the conflict is a difficult task. The Saudi government kept strict control over

the local press, which in any case was limited in size and had a very small circulation. Saudi papers refused to publish propaganda articles in favour of any European country. On the other hand, Egyptian newspapers were sold in Saudi Arabia, so the literate class in the country's few urban centres was exposed to diverse views.[116] At least some of the local population in Jeddah sympathized with the Abyssinians. In October 1935 a crowd listening to the news on the radio cheered reports of Abyssinian successes. The Italian Chargé d'Affaires protested to the Saudi government. When some boys in Jeddah played a game of Italians vs. Abyssinians, in which the latter always won, Persico, who apparently lacked a sense of humour, complained again and the boys were cautioned.[117]

Manoeuvring Yemen

Like Ibn Saud, the Imam Yahya, ruler of Yemen, found himself attempting to navigate between Italian commercial and politico-military demands, Ethiopian overtures and Britain's interests in the region. Like the Saudis, the Yemeni government was approached by the Ethiopian government in spring 1935, with an offer to conclude a treaty of friendship. Unlike Ibn Saud, the Imam opted to accept the Ethiopian offer and entered into negotiations. Upon learning of this, Suvich asked Dr Dubbiosi, the head of the Italian mission in Sana'a, to intervene to prevent the treaty from being signed.[118] However, Dubbiosi's intervention came too late and the Ethiopian emissaries succeeded in reaching an agreement with the Yemenis. Suvich then asked the doctor to check with the Imam and his Foreign Minister, Raghib Bey, whether they were interested in opening negotiations regarding the renewal of the treaty of friendship with Italy (the treaty of September 1926 was due to elapse in 1936). The revised treaty, Suvich promised, would be advantageous to both countries. The Yemenis expressed interest but did not perceive the matter as being very urgent.[119]

That said, the Imam felt it necessary to assure the Italians that the treaty with Ethiopia was to have no effect on the good relations between Sana'a and Rome. In early July 1935 the Imam was sick and Dr Dubboisi came to treat him. Yahya used this opportunity to declare that recent claims made in the Arab and European press, that he was backing Ethiopia in its dispute with Italy, were false. The treaty with the Ethiopians was merely one of friendship and commerce. He assured the doctor that the volume of trade with Addis Ababa was limited and said he would not allow the unloading of foreign

supplies destined for Ethiopia (the Italians were concerned about shipments of war materiel). Suvich was very pleased with the Imams declarations.[120]

Despite the friendly attitude displayed by the Palazzo Chigi, there were those in the Fascist apparatus and particularly among the Italian forces in East Africa, who wanted to secure for Italy certain strategic positions along the Yemeni coast.[121] However, Mussolini, who was troubled by 'Ethiopian and British activities' in Yemen, adopted a more cautious approach. 'Any occupation of Yemenite territory by us would provoke a conflict with Great Britain and an Anglo-Yemenite union in which Great Britain would be the gainer' he wrote to De Bono, adding that 'It is therefore necessary to make [an] attempt to improve our relations with the Yemen if possible.' The Duce authorized Jacopo Gasparini, who had initiated the contacts with the Imam in the 1920s, 'to get into touch with the Yemen government' in order to influence their attitude regarding the conflict.[122]

Officially, Yemen remained neutral during the war in Ethiopia. Yahya refused to allow the enrolment of Yemeni troops for service outside the country, a ban that applied not only to the Ethiopian army but also to Italy's colonial army. Until the first half of 1935 the Italians had an office in Aden that recruited natives from the Aden Protectorate and from Yemen for military service in Africa. In the past Italy had made use of Yemeni *askaris* in Libya and elsewhere but this was no longer permitted.[123] However, like his Saudi counterpart, the Imam's neutrality eventually assumed the form of limited assistance to the Italian war effort. A distant relative of the Imam, who was a contractor for the Italians, managed to persuade him to allow civilian labourers to be sent to Eritrea. Subsequently, a good number of labourers were enlisted and, according to De Bono, crossed the Red Sea to Massawa in canoes where they were employed as stevedores. Furthermore, the Italians in Eritrea were able to purchase camels in Yemen, though they were unsuccessful in obtaining horses there.[124]

Following the outbreak of war, Suvich instructed Dubbiosi to tell Yemeni authorities that the Fascist government had been forced to initiate hostilities against Ethiopia in order to secure Italy's colonies and to allow their economic development. He assured the Yemenis that Italy only sought to maintain and consolidate its friendly relations with them.[125] However, the Imam was apprehensive. Like the Saudis, the Yemeni government approached the British during the conflict, seeking assurances in case their country was to be attacked by Italy. The Yemeni request, like the Saudi one, was turned down on the basis that London

did not want to violate its commitment to the 1927 Rome Agreement. The Foreign Office nonetheless interpreted this appeal as a sign that the Imam was moving away from the Italians and thus coming closer to the British orbit.[126]

Dubbiosi had an inkling that something was going on behind the scenes. He informed the Foreign Ministry in Rome that the British had been spreading rumours to the effect that Italy wished to occupy the coastal zone of Yemen. In addition, it was rumoured that the Italians had asked to use Mokha and Taiz for the recuperation of troops stationed in the zone of Assab. Dubbiosi insisted that Britain's systematic campaign was aimed at arousing suspicions against Italy. He implored Rome not to leave the field to the British. He also complained that local public opinion supported the Abyssinians.[127] The British were indeed concerned about Italian designs over the Sheikh Said peninsula at the southern mouth of the Red Sea. British officials in Aden reported that the Italian Consul Pasqualucci had contacted a Yemeni officer and inquired whether there were any British officers in Sheikh Said. Pasqualucci was reported to have said 'That the British government would never dare to interfere and, moreover, could not, if the Italians had any designs on Yemen' and that Italy attached great importance to Sheikh Said. London was also informed that the Italians had asked the Imam to allow them to send their sick and wounded to Mokha and that the Imam had so far refused.[128]

Suvich insisted that these accusations were completely false and he instructed Dubbiosi to deny them. These insinuations, he said, were spread by the British in order to damage the good relations between Yemen and Italy and in order to create a pretext for Britain to intervene in Sheikh Said and eventually to occupy it. In an attempt to revive old animosities, Suvich pointed out that while the British had backed the Saudis during the conflict over Asir, Italy had for many years maintained good relations with Yemen. Furthermore, Britain had forced the Imam to resolve the question of the frontier with Aden in a manner that was unfavourable to Yemen.[129] Rome was clearly interested in drawing Yemen closer or, at the very least, preventing the Imam from drawing nearer to Britain. In early 1936, the Palazzo Chigi as well as Gasparini in Eritrea wanted Italy to provide the arms the Imam wished to obtain, even if these had to be purchased abroad, in order to pave the way for the renewal of the treaty of friendship (though financial constraints made this difficult).[130] As we shall see in Chapter 3, Yahya soon calculated that it was in his best interest to maintain good relations with the emerging empire across the Red Sea.

The Palestine dilemma

During the war in Ethiopia the Italian Foreign Ministry employed a very diverse and somewhat uncoordinated policy towards Palestine. At the beginning of the war Rome's representatives in London and Geneva tried to persuade Zionists leaders to use their influence on the British not to include Palestine in the sanctions against Italy. They argued that the market in Palestine would suffer from the sanctions. In November 1935 the Italian delegates at the League of Nations asked the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann whether the shipping of Jewish immigrants to Palestine by the Italian firm *Lloyd Triestino* would also be affected by the sanctions. More sinister was the warning Moshe Shertok (Sharett), the Political Secretary of the Jewish Agency, received from De Angelis, the Consul General in Jerusalem, who said that Jewish opposition to the Italian war in Africa might compel Mussolini to reconsider his attitude towards the Jews.[131] No such pressure was exerted on the Arab leadership in Palestine, apparently because the Palazzo Chigi did not believe in their ability to influence Britain. However, Radio Bari's Arabic broadcasts did try to arouse indignation towards the mandatory power by claiming that Palestine was being forced to partake in the sanctions, thus harming the country's economy and reducing it into a mere British colony.[132]

During the same period Raffaele Guariglia, head of the Special Office on the 'Ethiopian Question' and the former director general for Europe, the Levant and Africa in the Foreign Ministry, was trying to strengthen Italy's relations with the Revisionist Zionist movement. On 15 October 1935 Guariglia met with Ze'ev Jabotinsky in Rome. The leader of the Revisionist movement impressed Guariglia who, soon after the meeting, wrote a memorandum for Suvich recommending a pro-Revisionist policy. He favoured accepting Jabotinsky's suggestion to open a central school for military instruction of Revisionist Zionists in Italy, seeing it as a continuation of the enrolment of Jewish cadets in the maritime school at Civitavecchia, now in its second year. Guariglia preferred the Revisionists to 'official Zionism', which he labelled as 'democratic-liberal, socialistic, plutocratic' and 'a British trademark'. He also concurred with Jabotinsky 'that our fears of alienating the Arabs are exaggerated'.[133]

At the end of 1935 Guariglia supported the proposed voyage of Corrado Tedeschi, a prominent Jewish member of the Fascist Party, to Palestine. The purpose of this mission was to strengthen ties between Italy and the Jews in Palestine. Tedeschi left for Palestine in February 1936 and stayed there for about a month, reporting back to Guariglia personally.[134]

This voyage, which had very few practical results, did not meet the approval of De Angelis. The Consul General had become convinced that Italy should back the Mufti's plan to initiate violent actions against the British in Palestine. In late January and early February 1936 De Angelis was in Rome to meet with Mussolini. He passed on a request from the Mufti for money and arms. The Consul General recommended fulfilling Husayni's request provided it was carried out secretly and without leaving any traces. The Duce gave his consent, somewhat hesitantly, and added that Italy must avoid providing the Jews with pretexts to justify their anti-Italian attitude.[135]

Mussolini's willingness to back an Arab revolt in Palestine did not prevent further *demarches* towards the Zionists. In March Dr David Senator, an official of the Jewish Agency, told an executive meeting that the representatives of *Lloyd Triestino* had renewed their offer of establishing a joint (Italian-Jewish) shipping company and founding yet another maritime school for Jewish 'pioneers'.[136] In early June the normally anti-Zionist Marquis Theodoli told the representative of the Jewish Agency in Geneva, Nahum Goldmann, that 'a National Home is no solution of the Jewish problem in Palestine. What the Jews need is a Jewish state, which England will never give them'. Goldmann had the impression that Theodoli was hinting that Italy would help the Zionists to achieve this.[137]

In Egypt Ugo Dadone, the director of AEO whose main concern was Italian propaganda among the Arabs, attempted during this period to recruit the support of the Zionists as well. In early July 1936 he called on a representative of the Jewish Agency in Cairo. Dadone told his interlocutor that 'the Jews would never get Palestine by relying on the British' and should thus 'work with the Italians, who would not be afraid of the Arabs and who would aim at creating a Jewish state in Palestine'. He then elaborated on Italy's plan to 'take Egypt' using troops from Libya and Abyssinia. The army in Ethiopia would eventually include half a million natives, he said. Until the plan for Palestine could be carried out, the Jews should settle in the Gojjam region in Ethiopia in order to 'help the Italians consolidate their position' and to 'foster Jewish sympathy for Italy'. As we shall see, the idea of settling Jews in Ethiopia would emerge and be shelved a number of times over the course of the next few years.[138] Dadone's suggestion of giving the Jews a state in Palestine was the last episode in Italy's somewhat disjointed policy towards Palestine before and during the Ethiopian War. Such suggestions were not repeated beyond this point. The aims of Italian policy towards Palestine in 1935–6 were clear enough: combating sanctions and attempting to

loosen the British grip on the country in order to facilitate greater Italian penetration. Nonetheless, the methods employed to reach these goals were inconsistent. After the appointment of Galeazzo Ciano as Foreign Minister in June 1936, Italian policy regarding Palestine became much more centralized. Over the next few years connections with Zionism – both mainstream and revisionist – were gradually severed. On the other hand, relations with the leaders of the Palestinian Arabs were beginning to flourish.

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Arab public opinion in Palestine was divided as to whom it should support in this conflict. This division was dictated, to a great extent, by the pre-existing disagreements between the supporters of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and the opposition, headed by the Nashashibi family.[139] The opposition was anti-Italian. The Mufti was pro-Italian by this stage, but his contacts with Italy were kept secret and his ability to publicly back the Fascist government was limited. This was to a certain extent the result of the infamous 'forged letter incident'. On 18 April 1935 the daily *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* published a reproduction of a letter allegedly written by Arslan and addressed to Husayni. The letter mentioned an agreement which the Amir had reached with the Italian government on the dissemination of Italian propaganda in Arab countries. Both Arslan and Husayni vigorously denied the letter's authenticity.[140] Nonetheless, following this incident and the public criticism it brought the Mufti, the press scene was to be dominated by those opposing Italy's policy towards Ethiopia.

The Jaffa daily *Filastin* set the tone. In July 1935 it reported on five young men from Sebastya, who were willing to volunteer for the Ethiopian army in the event of a war with Italy. In August *Filastin* ridiculed Radio Bari for publicizing the pro-Italian articles of Arslan, which Arab and Muslim public opinion was not interested in hearing. In September the same paper urged the Islamic Congress of Jerusalem, headed by the Mufti, to put forward a show of support for the Abyssinians, 'who have the sympathy of the entire Arab world'. In October *Filastin* violently attacked Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and publicized the founding of a 'Friends of Abyssinia' society in Jerusalem. On 15 October the paper published an interview with the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan who said that 'all the Arabs oppose the aggression against Ethiopia', a country he described as a 'historic friend of Islam and of the Arabs'. *Filastin* maintained its anti-Italian position at least until spring 1936.[141]

The Mufti-oriented *Al-Jama'a al-Arabiyya*, on the other hand, took a more moderate position towards Italy and criticized British policy instead.[142] The Mufti refrained from issuing a proclamation supporting the Ethiopians as the opposition demanded. In the months preceding the outbreak of war, Husayni visited Syria and, according to the press, met with the Saudi Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hamza, who was also in Syria and Lebanon at the time.[143] In October 1935 Hamza sent a message to Persico, the Italian representative in Jeddah, stating that his friends in Palestine and Transjordan were 'willing to begin work at once' and were asking for 25,000 pounds.[144] In January 1936 the Mufti secretly appealed to the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem to supply him with money and arms with which he could initiate a revolt against the British. This marked the beginning of a collaboration that would develop during the Arab Revolt in Palestine.[145]

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Jewish public opinion in Palestine hosted a variety of reactions to the conflict in Abyssinia. In general, mainstream Zionism was critical towards Italy. Chaim Weizmann had met with Mussolini on four occasions in the past and had even heard the Duce express his support for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. However, by 1935–6 the Zionist leader had abandoned all hope of obtaining anything worthwhile from Italy and he openly sided with the British.[146] The socialist daily *Davar* strongly opposed Italy's venture in Abyssinia, but also criticized Britain for not doing anything to thwart Mussolini in due time. The paper asserted that a clear and strong response by the democracies would have prevented the Duce from invading Ethiopia.[147] The pacifist President of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Judah Leib Magnes, sent a public letter to the editors of the *Palestine Post* and the *Manchester Guardian* calling on the Palestine government to abstain from sanctions and to remain neutral in the war, thus enabling Jerusalem to 'become the voice and conscience of the world's religions'.[148]

The Revisionist Zionist movement was more sympathetic towards Italy. An article published on 23 October 1935 in *HaYarden*, the movement's official newspaper, envisaged 'an Ethiopia conquered by Italy, which would thrive and prosper like any other European colony'. The article described the rule of the Negus as 'despotic and tyrannical'.[149] On 8 November the same paper published an interview with the leading journalists of the Revisionist movement, which centred on

the topic: 'the conflict in Abyssinia and the Jewish state'. In the introduction to the article the board of editors stressed that the movement's official institutions had not yet formulated their position on the matter and that the interviewees represented their own personal opinions. The main conclusions of the article were that it was better that Italy won the war; otherwise it would be a 'failure for the white race'. Furthermore, the Jews in Palestine could stand to benefit from the threat Italy posed to the British in the Suez Canal area. If Italian policy increased Britain's dependence on the Jews in Palestine the mandatory power might be induced to give them a state. However, the Jews did not wish to see another power in the Mediterranean taking over the mandate or the authority over Palestine from Britain. Another country might try to colonize Palestine with its population surplus, something the British did not have.[150]

In 1936 Zvi Kulitz, a member of the Revisionist movement and a former trainee at the naval school in Civitavecchia, published a biography of Mussolini – the only original Hebrew biography of the Duce written to date. Kulitz described Mussolini using nearly messianic terms. 'A nation that was depressed, oppressed, disjointed and lacking self awareness for hundreds of years has to see in a leader like Mussolini a godsend, a saviour and a redeemer', he wrote, praising the Duce's ability to shape reality according to his will. Echoing Italian propaganda, Kulitz described democracy as a nineteenth century ideal soon to 'evaporate' in the face the true force of the twentieth century – Fascism.[151] The book illustrates that, at least some of the members of the Revisionist movement, supported the Italian cause wholeheartedly.

Syria, Lebanon and Iraq

In contrast to other Arab societies in the Middle East, Syrian and Lebanese public opinion appears to have been more open towards the Italian position. At a safe distance from East Africa and owing to the temporarily good relations between France and Italy, the threat of Fascist expansionism was not as potent as it was in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The Italian representatives in Beirut and Damascus reported an increasing demand for Italian news material by the local press throughout 1935. Articles and photographs provided by the Italian legations in Syria and Lebanon were published in a wide variety of Arabic and French newspapers. The popular Maronite-Lebanese daily *Al-Bilad*, for instance, was favourable towards Italy throughout the Ethiopian conflict without receiving Italian funds.[152]

Opposition to Italy's policy towards Ethiopia was strongest among the Greek-Orthodox clergy, anti-colonialist circles and some ultra-religious Muslim activists.[153] This opposition did have some practical results. In the months preceding the outbreak of war Syrian, Lebanese and Armenian labourers were recruited and shipped from Beirut to East Africa by Italian firms. This was met with a hostile reaction from the National Bloc and was denounced in churches and mosques all over Syria and Lebanon.[154] The local press cited a letter received from a Syrian in East Africa, complaining of the harsh conditions under which the recruits were forced to work. By early October 1935 French authorities had banned the departure of workmen, closed down the Italian recruitment bureau and refused to issue passports for the purpose of enlistment.[155]

In Iraq public opinion was largely preoccupied with tensions between the central government and Yezidi, Kurdish and Shi'a groups. Italian propaganda was generally unsuccessful in winning-over the Iraqi public. Sanctions against Italy were enforced rigorously and the overwhelming majority of the press adopted an anti-Italian stand throughout the war in Ethiopia.[156] The conflict thwarted Italy's attempts to acquire greater access to Middle Eastern oil. In the early 1930s the Italian state hydrocarbons agency, AGIP, obtained 25 per cent of the shares of Mosul Oil Fields, a multi-national company which enjoyed substantial concessions in Northern Iraq. In 1934 AGIP, with the assistance of the Italian government, increased its holdings in Mosul Oil Fields, accumulating 52 per cent of its shares by March 1935. However, in early 1936, the Italian government, which was severely strained by the costs of the Ethiopian War, was no longer able to maintain its financial support of AGIP's commitments in Iraq. The Italian firm was therefore instructed to accept the offer of Chase Bank to buy its shares and consequently, by June 1936, the Italians had lost their hold on Mosul Oil Fields.[157] For Mussolini's Italy, expansion in Africa was more important than insuring independent access to oil.

Conclusions

Throughout most of 1935 and 1936 Italian policy in the Middle East stood in the shadow of Ethiopia, both in terms of its aims and in the ways in which it was received. Following the Ethiopian Crisis, Fascist Italy was widely interpreted as challenging Britain's hegemony in the Middle East. After the conquest of Ethiopia, Mussolini was aware that if he wished to enlarge his empire it would have to be done despite or even against the British Empire and not along side it. The tightening of

Italian relations with Nazi Germany in autumn 1936 may serve as proof of this strategic decision.

Rome's policies in the region varied from one country to another, depending on its geographic proximity to Eastern Africa. In the countries nearest to the scene – Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen – Italy exerted a greater amount of pressure compared to more distant countries, such as Iraq. The support, or at least the neutrality of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, both on the eastern shore of the Red Sea, was crucial for Italian supply and communication routes with Eritrea. Active Egyptian hostility, even though it was not an independent country, could have obstructed the passage of Italian ships through the Suez Canal on their way to East Africa.[158] Another factor influencing Italy's attitude was each country's political status. For example, the British mandate over Palestine and the growing tension between Palestinian Arabs and Jews provided Italy with an opportunity to attack British policy. Rome sought to strengthen its position in that country, while keeping the British busy and thus weakening their ability to confront Italy. In Syria and Lebanon the Italians restricted themselves mainly to conducting pro-Italian propaganda. These countries were less targeted than Egypt and Palestine, owing to the temporarily good relations between Italy and the mandatory power, France.

The tension between London and Rome revealed the anti-British aspects of Italy's pro-Arab and pro-Muslim policy. This dimension of Italian policy would remain omnipresent until the Second World War. In the years to follow, Italy's perceived success in conquering Ethiopia despite British opposition raised its status in the eyes of some Arab nationalists seeking to rid their countries of British dominance. The Ethiopian crisis paved the way for cooperation between such elements and the Fascist regime. While the creation of the Italian *Impero* increased the suspicion of some Middle Eastern leaders – especially in Egypt and Saudi Arabia – regarding Italy's ultimate intentions in the region, Rome's position as a power to be reckoned with in Middle Eastern affairs was affirmed.

The appointment of Ciano as Foreign Minister in June 1936 brought about greater centralization in Italy's policy towards the countries of the Middle East. The regime began to synchronize its conduct in the colonies in Africa with its policy vis-à-vis the Arab world. In 1937 Fascist Italy's pro-Arab and pro-Muslim policy was to have its finest hour.

3
The Protector of Islam, June 1936–March 1938

> Peoples of Egypt, you will be told that I have come to destroy your religion. [This is an obvious lie;] do not believe it! Answer back [to those impostors] that I have come to restore to you your rights and to punish the usurpers; and that I respect God, His prophet, and the Koran more than the Mameluks do.
>
> (Napoleon, June 1798)[1]

> [T]he Mahometans [are] a tremendous card in our game in case you or I were suddenly confronted by a war with the certain meddlesome Power!'
>
> (Kaiser Wilhelm II to Tsar Nicholas II, 20 October 1898)[2]

In early May 1936 the Duce announced Italy's victory in the Ethiopian War after Badoglio's forces entered Addis Ababa. The Fascist regime finally had its empire. By this stage the triangle of forces which defined Italy's policy in the Middle East was already in place. Rome's three central ambitions were: to make use of political developments in the Middle East in a way that would pressure Britain into recognizing the newly founded Italian *Impero*; to expand Italian influence in the Middle East; and to pacify Italy's African colonies (bordering on the Middle East) as far as possible, while promoting colonial ventures within them. This chapter will demonstrate how the Fascist regime was trying to achieve all three goals simultaneously. However, these ambitions were also mutually limiting since it was not possible fully to attain all of them at the same time. It is argued here that in the period between May 1936 and April 1938 Italy temporarily succeeded

in balancing these three desires, while reducing to a minimum the contradictions between them.

The following sections analyze the European and domestic considerations which influenced Italy's Middle Eastern policy. They examine Italian military preparations with regard to the Middle East and Rome's attempts to increase political and commercial penetration into the region. We then move on to see how the pro-Muslim policy in Italy's colonies functioned and how it was used for foreign policy purposes. Finally, the chapter analyses the 'propaganda war', which developed between Italy and Britain, as well as responses in the Middle East to Italian policy and declarations. Italy's involvement in the Arab revolt in Palestine, which unfolded at the same time as the events described here, will be discussed separately, in the next chapter, due to its complexity.

The European context of Italy's policy in the Middle East

Italian policy in the Middle East was, to a considerable extent, dependent on the state of international affairs in Europe. Having conquered Addis Ababa and having proclaimed an empire, Mussolini could have abandoned the anti-British aspects of the Middle Eastern policy Italy adopted in the summer of 1935. He could have returned to stressing Italy's role as a bridge between East and West as he had done before the Ethiopian Crisis. This did not happen. The war in Ethiopia, sanctions and the Spanish Civil War increased the rift between the Fascist regime in Italy and the European democracies. The short-lived Italo-French *détente* that started with the Laval-Mussolini talks of January 1935 was now at risk, owing to the rise to power of Leon Blum and the Popular Front as well as to the conflicting positions adopted by the two countries over the war in Spain. Between spring 1936 and spring 1938 Italy maintained the subversive aspects of its Middle Eastern policy, with varying degrees of intensity, depending on the general state of relations between Italy and the democratic powers.

In the summer of 1936 Rome issued conciliatory statements towards London while at the same time making overtures towards Berlin. As far as Italy's Middle Eastern policy is concerned, the most significant outcome of the tightening of Italo-German relations was Hitler's statement to Ciano during their meeting at Berchtesgaden in late October that 'The Mediterranean is an Italian sea. Any future modification of the Mediterranean equilibrium must be in Italy's favour.'[3] Unlike Imperial Germany in the period before the First World War, which had considerable interests in the Middle East, Hitler's relative lack of involvement in

the region freed the Italians from a potential competitor. By November 1937, Mussolini could assure the Germans that an understanding could be reached regarding Austria since 'Italian interest is no longer as lively as it was some years ago, for one thing because [of] Italy's imperialist development, which was now concentrating her interests on the Mediterranean and the colonies.'[4] As the Third Reich began to expand in Europe, Mussolini and Ciano sought and received further assurances of German non-intervention in the Mediterranean.[5] The establishment of the Rome-Berlin Axis gave the Duce a freer hand in devising Italy's Middle Eastern policy.

In his famous speech at the Piazza del Duomo in Milan on 1 November 1936, in which he proclaimed the existence of the Axis, the Duce also emphasized the importance of the Mediterranean. For Italy, he said, 'it is life', while for Britain it was only 'a road, one of many roads, a short-cut rather'. Characteristically combining confrontational and appeasing statements, Mussolini added that 'We do not intend … to threaten that road, we do not propose to interrupt it, but, on the other hand, we demand that our rights and vital interests should also be respected'. A clash between the two powers should be avoided by 'frank, rapid, complete agreement on the basis of mutual recognition of interests'.[6] London responded favourably to this overture, despite the scepticism of Eden and other Whitehall officials. Throughout December Drummond and Ciano held talks. On Eden's request, Drummond asked for an end to 'anti-British intrigue and propaganda in the Near East'. However, Ciano 'expressed complete ignorance' about this matter.[7] On 31 December 1936 there was an exchange of notes between Ciano and Drummond and on 2 January 1937 the two signed a common declaration known, ironically, as the Gentlemen's Agreement in which it was recognized that Italy and Britain had equally vital interests in freedom of passage through the Mediterranean. The signatories also disclaimed any desire to modify 'the *status quo* as regards national sovereignty of territories in the Mediterranean area'.[8]

However the effects of this joint declaration were nullified almost as soon as it had been signed when Mussolini dispatched reinforcements to Spain, and Eden sent instructions to the British legations in the Balkans, which were intercepted by SIM, to obstruct the Italo-Yugoslav rapprochement.[9] Anglo-Italian relations remained strained through most of 1937. In August Italian submarines attacked British and other vessels carrying supplies for Republican Spain. In late September Mussolini visited Germany and on 6 November Italy joined the German-Japanese anti-Comintern pact. Finally, on 11 December Italy announced its

intention to abandon the League of Nations. The first sign of change came on 20 February 1938 with Eden's resignation from the Foreign Office. This paved the way for a new round of talks between Drummond (now Lord Perth) and Ciano which culminated in the Easter Accords of April 1938.

The crystallization of the 'Arab policy' at home

Ciano's appointment as Foreign Minister in June 1936 brought a centralizing thrust to Italy's Middle Eastern policy. Shortly after entering the Palazzo Chigi he fully approved a *relazione di massima*, reviewing Italy's previous attitude towards the Arab world and outlining what the ministry apparatus considered as the desirable course of action for the future. It explained that in recent years, Italy had attempted to resume its historic role as a bridge between East and West, to encourage 'Arab-Muslim nationalisms', and to reduce the negative repercussions of Italy's military actions in Libya by launching a pro-Muslim policy in that colony. The ministry estimated that this policy had already produced noticeable manifestations of support for Italy during the period of sanctions and the Ethiopian War.

The *relazione* went on to say that Italy's future policy should be guided by two central interests: from a 'negative' point of view relations with the Arab countries would enable Rome to exert pressure on Britain and France; and from a 'positive' point of view such relations ought to 'affirm our increasing moral, cultural and commercial influence in these countries'. The ministry drew a distinction between North Africa and the Middle East. Italy should avoid supporting the national movements of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, at least for the time being, so as not to cause unnecessary disturbances in Italian Libya. The Middle East on the other hand was seen as a fertile ground for Italian activity which should include stronger commercial and cultural ties, secret contacts with leading political figures in the region, financial assistance and the supply of arms. The leaders around whom Italian policy ought to revolve were King Ibn Saud of Arabia; the ruler of Yemen, Imam Yahya; the leaders of the Syrian-Palestinian Delegation in Geneva, Shakib Arslan and Ihsan al-Jabiri; the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni; the Lebanese Maronite Patriarch, Monsignor Arida; and the nationalist Syrian leaders Subhi Barakat and Hashim al-Atasi. The Foreign Ministry also advocated the use of both external and internal propaganda. External propaganda should aim to accustom the Arabs to 'the weight that Fascist Italy is destined to exercise over

the destiny of the Mediterranean people'. Internal propaganda should seek to increase the awareness of the Italian populace on matters regarding Arab and Muslim countries.[10]

Not surprisingly, during 1937 the future of the Arab world became a recurring theme in the Italian press. Numerous articles appeared, ranging from those stressing Italy's pragmatic geopolitical interest in supporting the Arabs to those underlining the ideological affinity between Fascism and Islam.[11] Paolo Balbis of the *Corriere Padano* stated that, from a practical point of view, 'a pan-Arab bloc might constitute a barrier against Bolshevism'.[12] Similar arguments could be found in the publications of the Fascist Party. Michelangelo Guidi praised the idea of Arab unity and Giovanni Selvi believed that a pan-Arab bloc, especially one led by King Ibn Saud, would hamper Britain's attempts to dominate the Middle East.[13]

On a more ideological note, Egidio Moleti di Sant'Andrea saw a 'mutual sympathetic comprehension' between Fascist and Islamic cultures. He too believed that an Islamic bloc could serve as a bulwark against Bolshevism.[14] The journal *La Vita Italiana*, edited by the adamantly anti-Jewish Giovanni Preziosi, continuously promoted the idea of solidarity between Fascism and Islam. In an article published in March 1937 Saïd Sciartini, one of the editors of Radio Bari's Arabic programme, explained that, aside from economic and commercial relations, there was also an 'ideological tie' between the Arab world and Fascist Italy. He stated that the Arab world was a 'fertile field' for Fascist ideological expansion and that Italy should invest in propaganda in these countries in order to combat Communism.[15] In May the journal published an article by Giovanni Tucci, claiming that Fascist Italy's 'wise policy' had gradually conquered the sympathy and the attention of the entire Muslim world.[16]

Most of the declarations about the affinity between Islam and Fascism were quite superficial, having little to say on the 'nature' of either or what precisely they had in common. A notable exception to this rule was Gino Cerbella's *Fascismo e Islamismo*, published in 1938. A colonial official in Asmara, Cerbella compared the emergence of Islam and Fascism, their respective objects of veneration and their conception of leadership. He pointed out that, like Muhammad, Mussolini was the founder of an empire and a religion. Similarly to the prophet, the Duce had changed forever the course that his people followed through the irresistible power he exerted over their minds. Finally, he argued that Fascism offered a 'complete, universal view of the world' and was, in a sense, the Islam of the twentieth century.[17]

A few years earlier, articles that regarded Italian colonialism as a Catholic crusade and presented Islam as the religion of barbarian peoples, threatening to submerge the spiritual values of the West, could still be published.[18] By 1937–8 there was no more room for such notions to be expressed publicly. The official line now emphasized the common ground between Fascist Italy and the Muslim world, an approach assisted by the growing collaboration between the regime and country's leading orientalists. Ettore Rossi, who replaced Nallino as editor of *Oriente Moderno* after the latter's death in 1938, was by this stage an active participant in the programmes of Radio Bari.[19]

But we must not overstate the importance of the philo-Islamic trend, epitomized in Fascist texts of the late 1930s, as it was not always sincere. Internal memoranda in the Italian Foreign Ministry continued to speak of the impressionable nature of 'the oriental soul' and the 'susceptibility' of the people of the region.[20] Furthermore, as we shall see in Chapter 5, many of the Fascist hierarchs retained their old prejudices, for instance when it came to granting Italian citizenship to the Arabs of Libya.

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Another factor, which appears to have had a peripheral effect on Italy's growing Middle Eastern policy, was Mussolini's increasingly anti-Jewish attitude. The Duce's approach towards Jews had always been ambiguous. As Alexander Stille observed, 'With respect to the Jews, Mussolini tailored his statements to suit the needs of the moment so that in his writings and speeches one can find almost every possible position – and its opposite.'[21] However, during the second half of the 1930s a certain consistency began to emerge. The presence of a large number of Jews among commentators criticizing Italy during the Ethiopian Crisis had a radicalizing influence on Mussolini's antisemitism.[22] In April 1936, for example, the Duce instructed Grandi to tell the correspondent of the *Financial Times*, Paul Einzig, that 'World-Jewry is doing an awful bargain in aligning itself with the anti-Fascist sanctions campaign against the one European country which, at least until now, has neither practised nor preached anti-Semitism'.[23] There was also a large number of Jews in the anti-Fascist *Giustizia e Libertà* movement, including the Rosselli brothers, who were assassinated on the regime's behest in 1937. Mussolini was further irritated by the rise to power of Leon Blum and the anti-Fascist Popular Front in France. In *Il Popolo d'Italia* Blum was condemned as 'one Jew who did not posses the gift of prophecy'. Finally, Margherita Sarfatti, the Duce's Jewish mistress and biographer, had long since lost her influence over him.[24]

A new aloofness towards the Zionist movement was already apparent in Mussolini's attitude shortly after the Ethiopian War. In July 1936, for instance, he refused to grant the Revisionist leader, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, an audience for fear of alienating the Arabs.[25] Anti-Jewish statements could also be found in Italy's propaganda in Arabic. For example, on 27 June 1936, Radio Bari stated that

> Palcor, a Jewish organ, published a few days ago that Italy is opposing granting independence to Syria and the Lebanon. The Italian government has pleasure in stating officially that this is not true and is a Jewish fabrication. We deny definitely that we harbour any ill will towards Arab states and [we] wish them welfare and prosperity. We were, and are still, sympathising with all Arab territories.[26]

The tendency to associate Zionism (or World-Jewry) with British interests in the Middle East does seem to have had some effect on Italy's growing opposition to the idea of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. In late 1936 the Peel Commission was sent by the British government to Palestine to look into the causes of the Arab Revolt. It submitted its final report in July 1937 in which it called for the partition of Palestine between an Arab state, a Jewish state and a small British protectorate. As we shall see in Chapter 4, the Italian government objected to this solution. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to assume that Italy's pro-Muslim and pro-Arab policy was based upon anti-Jewish considerations. Rome had other, more pressing interests which guided its policy in the Middle East.

Construction of military bases and strategic planning

Parallel to the attempts of the Fascist regime to woo the Arab world, the Italian armed forces tried to prepare for the possibility of war against Britain and France in the Mediterranean. In the autumn of 1935, when the Abyssinian Crisis threatened to erupt into an Italo-British confrontation, the Italian military declared itself to be completely unprepared for such an eventuality. The navy could not hope to match the British fleet. The naval bases from which the Italians could hope to launch a strike on British interests in the eastern Mediterranean – Tobruk in Cyrenaica and Leros in the Aegean – were far from ready to support combat operations and their defences were believed to be weak when confronted with the naval and aerial capabilities possessed by the British. The air force, which lacked long-range bombers, was unable to subject Alexandria to sustained and effective aerial bombardment and

was barely capable of reaching the Suez Canal. The airstrips and hangars of Libya and those on the Dodecanese were either still on the drawing board or under construction.[27] If Italy were to contend with Britain for mastery over the Mediterranean, much work needed to be done.

In an attempt to remedy the situation the bases in the Dodecanese were strengthened. In April 1936 the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Italian air force, General Pietro Pinna, inspected the islands and submitted a detailed plan for transforming their airfields into bases capable of supporting offensive operations in the eastern Mediterranean. Many of his recommendations were implemented and on 1 March 1937 the *Comando Aeronautica dell'Egeo* (Aegean Air Force Command) was established. At the same time air force bases in Libya were upgraded and some of them were adapted to house the new S 81 long-range bombers. The chiefs of staff also paid considerable attention to improving the defences of the naval bases in Tobruk and the Aegean. By late 1936 and early 1937 they believed that in case of war these could be used to launch attacks against the British at Alexandria, Cyprus and Haifa.[28]

In April 1937 Mussolini notified the heads of the armed forces that Britain and France were likely to be Italy's opponents in a future war. Of the three services, the army saw itself as the one to take the lead in such a confrontation. General Alberto Pariani, who became the army's Chief of Staff and also the Undersecretary at the Ministry of War in autumn 1936, believed that North Africa would be the likely and preferable theatre for a confrontation with the British and the French. Recent political developments had made this seem more plausible. Italy's agreement with Yugoslavia in spring 1937 enabled the Chiefs of Staff to reduce the number of troops on the eastern frontier of the Italian mainland and to ship a second army corps to Libya. Strongly supporting the principles of lightness, elasticity and dash, Pariani sought for Italy a quick victory in a war of rapid movement in the desert rather than focusing on the insurmountable Alps. He therefore promoted the transformation of the army's heavy three-regiment divisions into smaller and more mobile *divisioni binarie*. During the Ethiopian War the Italian military had examined the possibility of striking at Sudan from East Africa. However, as it became apparent that Ethiopia was not yet in a position to support a converging attack on Sudan, any offensive operations in the near future would depend entirely on Libya. Pariani suggested that in a war against Britain, Italy should launch an offensive from Cyrenaica into Egypt. His concepts influenced the military's main plan for a war in which Italy collaborated with Germany against Britain and France, 'P.R. 12', first circulated in January 1938. This plan saw Italian North Africa serving as

a base for operations against the Suez Canal, while securely defending its Tunisian frontier. It called for a rapid surprise attack along the Egyptian coast to be carried out by mobile units supported by naval forces.[29]

Pariani's plan received mixed reactions. Marshal Badoglio was sceptical regarding the possibility of launching offensive operations in North Africa. Ciano, on the other hand, was enthusiastic and suggested landing troops at Port Said and Suez as part of a surprise attack. The Foreign Minister instructed Serafino Mazzolini, the new Italian Minister in Cairo, to examine the possibilities of using the Italian communities in Egypt to cause havoc in the cities and perhaps to carry out military sabotage in the event of war with Britain.[30] As secret military planning progressed, diplomacy attempted to augment Italy's position in the Middle East.

Arms deals and political penetration

The period following the Ethiopian War saw a number of Italian attempts to increase political and commercial penetration into various Middle Eastern countries. Financial investments in the region by the Italian private sector were fairly limited and were mainly restricted to shipping, banking and insurance.[31] The lack of commercial enterprise was therefore filled by the state, with Ciano and the Foreign Ministry pushing for greater Italian involvement in the sale of arms to Middle Eastern countries. Most of these transactions proved to be economically unprofitable. As the examples of Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Yemen illustrate, Ciano's dealings with the Middle East were motivated by political rather than commercial interests. Rome's policy sought to increase Italian influence in the region while drawing the independent Arab states away from the British orbit.

The Italian Foreign Ministry considered King Ibn Saud to be a key figure in the Arab world and Ciano endeavoured to strengthen Italy's relations with Saudi Arabia. In July 1936 Rome examined the possibility of enlisting the services of Khalid al-Hud al-Qargani, one of the King's closest advisers, 'for informative purposes' and also to influence the Saudi attitude towards Italy.[32] Italy had little to offer the Saudi kingdom in the way of commercial enterprises or development of infrastructure. One way in which the Italian government could be of service to the Saudis was cooperation in the field of aviation. Italy had given Ibn Saud three Caproni aircraft as a gift in the spring of 1936 and a tri-motor aircraft in November of the same year. Italian instructors were sent to train Saudi pilots at the newly founded Saudi Aviation

School.[33] Another avenue which the Italians tried to pursue was the sale of arms through which Ciano was hoping to achieve two political goals: to increase Italian influence in Arabia at Britain's expense; and to make weapons available for the Arab rebels in Palestine, based on the assumption that Ibn Saud would act as a go-between (see Chapter 4). In April 1937 the Italian Minister in Jeddah, Luigi Sillitti, informed the Saudis that Italy was willing to sell them arms.[34] The Saudi King promptly notified the British representative in Jeddah, Reader Bullard, of the Italian offer. According to Bullard's report, 'Ibn Saud begged that we would not think he was trying to play off one country against another'. Having given 'us this information out of loyalty' the King 'proposed to keep [the] Italians in play'. The Italian offer included 4,000 new rifles at 250 lire apiece.[35]

British interceptions of communications between Ibn Saud and his minister in London from the summer of 1937 seem to confirm that maintaining good relations with Britain was of primary concern to the King at this stage.[36] On the other hand, similar sources indicate that in 1937 Ibn Saud was indeed attempting to purchase arms from various countries. According to an intercepted Japanese communiqué from May 1937, the Saudi Chargé d'Affaires in Cairo inquired whether his country could purchase arms from Japan.[37] Ibn Saud's formal ally, the British government, 'had provided all the arms which their own urgent needs enabled them to spare' and were not in a position to furnish him with any more.[38] The King was trying to establish ties with Britain's rivals but was hoping to do so without jeopardizing his relations with London.

During the summer of 1937 the Saudi government sought to ascertain Italy's true intentions vis-à-vis the Arab world in general and the Palestine question in particular. Ibn Saud's foreign policy had become pre-occupied with finding a solution to the Arab Revolt in Palestine. The King opposed the partition plan suggested by the Peel Commission Report and was interested in knowing Italy's position on this matter. In August 1937 the King's advisor Yusuf Yasin presented Sillitti with four questions for the Italian government:

1 Whether the permanent policy that Italy intends to follow respects the [integrity of the] Arab countries (at my [Sillitti's] request, he specified referring to Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Transjordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen).
2 What is the realistic policy of Italy regarding the partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs; does Italy not see the creation of a Jewish state on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean as a future danger?

3 Up to what point can the Arabs count on the support of Italy, materially and morally?
4 What assistance and what support can Italy provide in cases of need and of necessity?[39]

On 31 August 1937 Ciano replied that Italy 'did not wish to see the influence of the European Powers strengthened either in the Mediterranean, or in the Arabian Peninsula and especially not on the eastern shore of the Red Sea'. Italy would like to see the countries under the mandate regime become sovereign and independent. Regarding the partition of Palestine, Ciano stated that Italy had not yet taken an official position, though he emphasized the importance his country attached to the friendship of the Arabs. As for the third and fourth questions, Ciano merely stated his willingness to back any initiative taken by Ibn Saud to insure a solution favourable to the Arabs.[40]

Apparently, this assurance was insufficient to dissolve Saudi suspicions over Italian intentions in the region. In October 1937 Abdullah Sulayman, the Saudi Finance and War Minister, notified Sillitti that Ibn Saud was not satisfied with the answers for the third and fourth questions.[41] Nonetheless, the King gave his consent for the continuation of the slow negotiations over the purchase of Italian arms. At the end of October 1937, the Saudi War Minister asked the Italian legation in Jeddah whether their government 'could spare or somehow obtain for him' 10,000 Mauser rifles with 10 million cartridges.[42] Italy did not possess such Mausers and Ibn Saud was not interested in the 70/87 type rifles that Italy wanted to sell. Ciano believed that an arms deal with the Saudis 'presents a notable interest from a political point of view'. He seems to have believed that some of these arms were destined for the Arab rebels in Palestine and therefore requested that the Mausers be purchased abroad. SANE, the society which had been formed in 1931 to promote Italian trade in the Red Sea, worked on behalf of the Italian Foreign Ministry to obtain offers for the sale of Mausers from German, Austrian and Hungarian firms. Ciano asked Felice Guarneri, the Minister for Exchange and Currency, for £135,000 in order to secure the deal.[43] He also instructed the Italian representatives in Jeddah to notify the Saudis that Italy would be able to supply the arms they requested and that it was willing to sell them at a reduced price. However, Ciano's plan was soon thwarted, not only because of Guarneri's reply that funds were lacking, but primarily because the Saudis changed their request. On 18 December Fuad Hamza, the Saudi Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, told Sillitti that Ibn Saud wished only to buy ten cannon for his army,

setting aside the request for Mausers.[44] The Italian government decided to give the Saudis the cannon as a gift in order to strengthen Italy's position in the Red Sea and to compete with the British and French missions there.[45]

Once again, Ibn Saud found it necessary to notify the British of his dealings with the Italians, though from the way in which this was presented Bullard got the impression that the Italians were forcing the deal on the Saudis. According to his report, at first the King had 'refused on the ground that his forces were equipped with Mausers' and he did not wish to introduce a new type of weapon. 'The Italians then said that they would get him any kind of rifles he liked'. Ibn Saud 'pleaded poverty, but the Italians said that that need not worry him: they would arrange easy terms. Keeping to his delaying tactics the King said that if they would provide samples he would study the matter.'[46] On 6 March 1938 Ibn Saud notified Bullard, in confidence, that in a few days he was to receive 'some guns as a present from the Italian Government'. These would be accompanied by three Italian instructors. The King told the British he had 'been forced to accept' this gift, but 'no material advantage will ever affect his relations with His Majesty's Government'. The Italian cannon landed in Jeddah on 9 March. They were accompanied by Captain Alfredo D'Auria of the Italian Artillery Corps and two non-commissioned officers. Bullard noted that the King's advisors 'seemed to take particular care' not to say which type of weapon was being delivered or how many units the consignment contained.[47]

Despite this gift of ten cannon, the Saudi government decided, for the time being, not to purchase rifles from Italy. Captain D'Auria and the two instructors who came with him to the Saudi Kingdom were sent back to Italy in mid-June 1938.[48] Instead of relying on Italy, the Saudis began, in summer 1938, to negotiate the purchase of arms from Nazi Germany. In August 1938 Fuad Hamza visited Berlin and told German officials that Ibn Saud had refused to buy arms from Italy for fear of losing his freedom to act as he wanted to. He trusted the Germans for they had no 'interests of power politics in the Arab region'.[49]

Ibn Saud was mistrustful of the Italians. In March 1937 he told Bullard and George Rendel, head of the Eastern Department at the Foreign Office, 'he had no belief whatsoever in Italian professions, for he knew what had happened in Tripoli and in Abyssinia.' In January 1938 he spoke of his 'dislike and fear of Italians'.[50] While these feelings may have been over-emphasized to increase British faith in his trustworthiness, they seem to reflect the King's genuine concerns. At the same time Ibn Saud did not want to give the Italians

the impression that he was hostile towards them for he had other geopolitical factors to consider. The King wished to maintain good relations with Britain but also had misgivings about British policy in the Arabian Peninsula and in Palestine.[51] Furthermore, he did not want to become too dependent on London. For this purpose he negotiated the purchase of arms from other countries, including powers which were potentially hostile to Britain such as Italy, Japan and Germany. As the clouds of a general war in Europe drew nearer, Ibn Saud did not want to be bound to one country and sought to maintain a fragile diplomatic balance. The growing commercial cooperation with the United States also reflected a Saudi desire for greater freedom to manoeuvre.

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1937 saw an unexpected improvement in Italy's relations with Iraq. Unlike Italian efforts to draw Saudi Arabia nearer to the Italian orbit, efforts which were instigated by Rome and had been continuing for years, the upgrading of Italian relations with Iraq hinged on internal Iraqi developments. In October 1936 Bakr Sidqi, a Kurdish General, led the first army officers' coup in modern Arab history and took control of Iraq. He did not, however, install himself as Prime Minister and retained instead the title of Army Chief of Staff. During the second half of the 1930s, and especially after the Sidqi coup, the rulers of Iraq hoped to modernize and enlarge their army in order to cope with potential external threats from Iran and Turkey as well as the internal hazard of unruly ethnic groups. The new regime also wished to reduce Iraqi dependence on Britain, which was unable to meet all of Iraq's demands for arms, by improving relations with other countries.[52]

The Iraqis began approaching Italian firms regarding the sale of fighter planes and bombers in 1936, even before sanctions were lifted. Fiat and Ansaldo asked the Italian government for permission to offer the Iraqis the sale of armoured personnel carriers as well as other vehicles. Ciano was enthusiastic about the idea and wanted to see Italy tap into the Iraqi market before other countries did so.[53] However, serious headway was only achieved after the Sidqi coup. The Italian Minister in Baghdad, Luigi Gabbrielli, believed that General Sidqi's authoritarian approach influenced his inclination towards regimes of power and authority such as Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.[54]

During the spring and early summer of 1937 Major Ali Muhammad Jawad, head of the Royal Iraqi Air Force, was in Italy. He was interested

in purchasing five Savoia Marchetti SM 79 bombers, four Fiat B. R. 20 (which were not ordered eventually) and fifteen Breda Ba 65 fighters. In July 1937 General Abdul Latif Nuri, the Iraqi Minister of National Defence, also came to Italy to oversee the final stage of the negotiations. According to the Italian legation in Baghdad, the Iraqi press praised the honour in which the General was received. The contracts were successfully concluded; the one with Breda guaranteed the supply of three aircraft by the end of August and a further twelve by the end of September (a schedule that was not met). Mussolini was personally notified about the deal as was Ciano. After the signature, Major Jawad flew back to Baghdad with one of the purchased SM 79 aircraft.[55] The Iraqis notified the British of the pending deal, stressing that the aircraft were needed urgently and that they would not be content with waiting until London could provide alternative planes. Eden protested that this went against the spirit of the Treaty of Alliance between the two countries but accepted it as a *fait accompli*.[56]

However, clouds soon appeared in the bright sky of Italo-Iraqi relations. On 19 July one of the SM 79 bombers crashed during an aerial display attended by several Iraqi officers. An Italian pilot, Rodolfo Gusa, was injured.[57] Worse was to follow. In August both Sidqi and Jawad were murdered in Mosul by rival army officers. The Italian Minister in Baghdad wrote that with the death of Sidqi Italy had lost a brave admirer.[58] Shortly afterwards the Iraqi government resigned and was replaced by another which was less inclined towards the Axis. Furthermore, the Iraqi air force, which at the time consisted of three squadrons of British aircraft and an aviation school with British instructors, did not have pilots trained to fly bombers, and the Iraqis wanted to avoid any difficulties with London surrounding the employment of foreign flight instructors. Therefore, in November 1937 the Iraqis asked to be released from their contract to purchase Savoia bombers and to be supplied only with the 15 Breda fighters. The Italian government refused, arguing that the planes had either already been built or were under construction. Eventually a settlement was worked out. The Breda aircraft were delivered to the Iraqis in spring 1938 and were accompanied by a number of technicians and instructors. As for the Savoia bombers, one had crashed, a further three were delivered and the money which was intended for the fifth was used to purchase light tanks of which the Iraqis eventually received eight. Rome agreed to cover all expenses related to maintaining Italian military personnel in Iraq.[59] While Italian weapon manufacturers succeeded in tapping into the Iraqi market as Ciano had

hoped, these transactions had not yet heralded an Iraqi move away from Britain and closer to the Italian sphere of influence.

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In the south-western corner of the Arabian Peninsula the Anglo-Italian rivalry and mutual suspicion that preceded the outbreak of war in Ethiopia continued to influence the policies of both powers. After the creation of the Italian *Impero* British Foreign Office and Colonial Office officials were preoccupied with Italian intentions regarding Yemen. Though the initial concern that the Italians would invade Yemen using troops stationed in East Africa soon subsided, the prospect of Italian 'gradual penetration' into Yemen remained.[60]

At the same time Italian officials were concerned over the extension of British control from the Aden Protectorate to the entire western strip of southern Arabia known as Hadramawt. Until the mid-1930s the Aden Protectorate was subordinate to the India Office. The British secured the well-being of their colony in Aden through a system of treaties with various local sheikhs in the hinterland surrounding it. However, as Ibn Saud's ability to extend his sovereignty over the tribes in the southern edges of his kingdom increased, so the need arose to define the frontier between Saudi Arabia and the Aden Protectorate. Fuad Hamza was in London in late June and the first half of July 1935 to discuss with British officials Saudi Arabia's borders with Aden and the Gulf states. The Colonial Office, which was soon to assume responsibility over Aden, favoured extending British control over Hadramawt both in order to have a comparable level of sovereignty to that practised by Ibn Saud and in order not to have other powers 'walk in and help themselves'.[61]

The Italians began to observe an increase in British attempts to strengthen their control over Hadramawt in February 1937. A British government decree of 18 March 1937 gave the Governor of Aden authority over all the territories south of the Saudi and Yemeni borders and west of the Sultanate of Oman-Muscat. On 5 April 1937 a British political officer was established in Mukalla with the authority to issue passports. Furthermore, the British were recruiting local armed men to form a native police force. Italian representatives in Aden and Djibouti reported on the construction of British bases in Hadramawt. The Italians deduced that the British were trying to assimilate the whole of Hadramawt into the Aden colony.[62] In July Rome made an unsuccessful attempt to thwart the expansion of British authority in southern Arabia. Guido Crolla of the Italian embassy in London met with Rendel at the Foreign

Office. While Rendel expressed concern over Italian activities in Yemen, Crolla referred to an article that was published in the *Daily Herald* on 10 June and spoke of the conquest of Hadramawt 'by order in Council'. Rendel explained that the British protectorate over Hadramawt was recognized by Turkey in 1914. Crolla, who was caught unprepared, said that he thought the protectorate applied only to the area around Aden. Rendel clarified that during the era of secret diplomacy the Anglo-Turkish treaty had not been published, but pointed out that it did appear in a 1933 publication. This conversation revealed an Italian information gap. Only after the Crolla-Rendel meeting did the embassy in London send a copy of this agreement to Rome.[63]

Ciano then put forward the argument that British policy in southern Arabia constituted a modification of the political and territorial equilibrium of the peninsula and thus contrasted with both the spirit and the letter of the 1927 Rome Agreement between Italy and Britain.[64] At the same time Ciano sought to rouse Arab opposition to British policy in Arabia. He instructed Dr Dubbiosi in Yemen to use his next meeting with the Imam to allude to the British decree, which extended the frontiers of the Aden Protectorate to the border of the Sultanate of Oman and gave the governor of Aden the right to exercise his power on all that territory, practically transforming it into a part of the British colony. He was to point out how Britain was disturbing the *status quo* in the peninsula while Italy supported the independence and integrity of the Arab states.[65] Ciano also instructed Ghigi in Cairo to try to get the Arab press involved in the Hadramawt question. He wanted to stress how Britain had 'annulled the independence of the heads of the Muslim tribes in southern Arabia, transforming a large zone which had until now enjoyed full political and administrative autonomy, into a colonial dominion.' This, he pointed out, also increased London's grip on Saudi Arabia and Yemen and rendered them vulnerable to British influence. Ciano wished that it would not appear as though the press was acting on behalf of Italy. He advised that the *Daily Herald* article, 'Conquest by Order in Council', be used as a springboard for attacks by the Arab press.[66]

Another way in which Rome sought to insure its influence in southern Arabia was by renewing its 1926 treaty of friendship with Yemen. The original treaty was set to expire after ten years and consequently, in September 1936, the Italian and Yemeni governments exchanged letters in order to prolong its validity until November 1937, leaving time for a new round of negotiations.[67] In August 1937 Senator Gasparini, who as Governor of Eritrea had orchestrated the signature of the first treaty,

returned to Yemen bearing gifts and was received with much pomp and ceremony. On 4 September the renewed treaty was signed, this time for a duration of 25 years. Despite some tensions in the relations between the two countries in the period surrounding the Ethiopian War, the Imam Yahya chose to remain within the Italian sphere of influence. Following the renewal of the treaty, the Imam sent Mussolini a letter which was published in the Italian press on 16 October 1937. The Imam thanked the Duce for sending Gasparini, who was 'a true friend'. He expressed his gratitude for the Italian government's conduct towards Yemen and towards all the Muslim states. The Imam wished that this policy would continue and added that a friendly approach of this sort was necessary for Italy to achieve greatness.[68] In late 1937 the Yemenis began negotiations over the purchase of cannon, rifles and ammunition from Italy. The son of Yahya, Saif al-Islam al-Husayni, visited Italy in early 1938 and delivered a speech which was transmitted by Radio Bari.[69] In Gaparini's words, Yemen could now be looked upon as having the same satellite-state position in the Red Sea as Albania had in the Adriatic. Furthermore, Italy's position in Yemen constituted a continual cause of anxiety for Britain with regard to its maritime communication with India.[70] The late 1930s illustrated once again that Fascist Italy's influence in the Middle East was most potent in Yemen.

The *Impero* in the service of Italy's image in the Middle East

Throughout the 1930s Italy's Middle Eastern policy was inextricably tied to the policy it followed in its colonies. As Ciano stated publicly:

> [I]t is a natural necessity for us to maintain the best relations with the Arab people, who contribute an intense and fruitful activity to the development of life in the Mediterranean. This necessity has been felt even more since the conquest of the Empire, in view of the number of Moslems who live in Italian Africa and the fact that the neighbouring countries and the countries on the shores of the Red Sea are also Moslem.[71]

From May 1936 until late 1938 Rome found a way for its colonial and foreign policies to complement rather than jeopardize each other.

In May 1936 only one third of Ethiopia had been conquered and Mussolini instructed Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, the new Governor of Italian East Africa, to capture the rest. While Italian policy in

Ethiopia – a combination of brute force and mollification – was often inconsistent, the Fascist regime repeatedly tried to make political and military use of Ethiopia's Muslims.[72] Of all the religious groups in Ethiopia, the Muslims benefited the most from Italian domination. While from a legal point of view all the inhabitants were to be treated equally, Graziani generally tended to handle the Muslims with special care and to strengthen their position. Soon after the *Impero* was established the Duce instructed Graziani to bring the Muslims of Ethiopia closer to Italy. The Marshal collaborated willingly both because he shared the general aims of Mussolini's pro-Muslim policy and because he trusted the Muslims more than he did the Copts. In August and again in October 1936 Graziani addressed Muslim crowds in Addis Ababa, promising that Italy would do everything in its power to protect its Muslim subjects. To demonstrate Italy's intentions, mosques and schools were to be built. In fact, Mussolini himself asked for a mosque to be constructed in Addis in gratitude for the Muslims' support during the war. It is estimated that during Italian rule in Ethiopia 50 mosques of stone and cement were built and 11 restored. Muslims throughout Italian East Africa were granted full religious freedom. Arabic became the official language in Harar and was taught in Muslim schools. The colonial government supported the school for Islamic law in Jimma and aspired to build an Islamic University in Harar for the Muslims of Ethiopia, the Red Sea and even India, thus turning the region into an important Islamic centre. Fascist authorities did not interfere with Islamic religious institutes to the same extent as they did with the Coptic Church. Administrative measures were taken to unite the separate Muslim groups and to improve their status. Graziani instructed the governors of Galla Sidama and Harar that, for political reasons, Muslim subjects should be favoured.[73]

From a military point of view, the Minister for the Colonies, Alessandro Lessona, estimated that in cases of internal unrest, the Muslims would constitute a valuable reserve of men on which Italy could always rely. Graziani shared this view and thought that, should a European conflict break out, the Muslims alone would support Italy in East Africa. In 1937 he formed a Muslim battalion in Harar and dispatched it to Addis Ababa to protect the capital against rebel attacks. As John Gooch has pointed out, the stationing of a Muslim battalion in the capital was concrete evidence of their military value.[74] Graziani also used Muslim troops to crush the revolt in the Christian Amharic provinces in October-November 1937. According to Alberto Sbacchi, the Italians' pro-Muslim approach was probably one of the reasons that brought about the Amharic revolt.

In October 1937 Lessona recognized the dangers that could arise from a too explicit pro-Muslim policy. French and British propaganda might make use of the down-trodden Copts and the morale of the Christian soldiers might be affected. Eventually, Graziani had gone too far down the pro-Muslim line and thus made it difficult to justify Italian policy. The Duke of Aosta, who replaced Graziani as Governor in December 1937, was instructed by Mussolini to treat all groups equally.[75]

Aside from playing a key role in Italy's colonial policy, enlisting the support of the Muslims in East Africa had another salient reason: it was good for the regime's public relations in the Islamic world. For a brief period colonial policy in Africa went hand in hand with Italian foreign policy in the Middle East. Shortly after the declaration on the founding of the Fascist *Impero*, Italian representatives in the Muslim world were instructed to 'exploit the fact that Arabic has been re-established as the official language at Harar, and that the mosques [there] are being repaired'.[76]

One of the clearest manifestations of the pro-Islamic policy in East Africa was the assistance the regime gave to Muslims wishing to perform the *Haj* (annual pilgrimage). In February 1937 the Ministry for the Colonies instructed the Governor General of Italian East Africa to allocate 200 gold Sterling to the Italian legation in Jeddah for the purpose of renting temporary accommodation for Italian subjects in Mecca and Medina. Italian authorities in East Africa and representatives in Saudi Arabia also spent considerable sums of money on the transportation of pilgrims to and from Jeddah.[77] Though the exact number of Muslim pilgrims from Italian East Africa who attended the *Haj* of 1937 was disputed (only 619 according to the British Minister in Jeddah while Italian figures were as high as 1696), this constituted a substantial increase compared to the 29 Abyssinians who attended the *Haj* in March 1935.[78] The Italian press pointed out with pride that 'This is a figure without precedent in the annals of the Muslims of Africa', adding that Muslims were formerly forced to hide their faith.[79] Upon returning to Africa many Muslims thanked the Italian authorities for their assistance in the organization of the pilgrimage and the Foreign Ministry instructed its representatives across the Arab world to make use of this information.[80] The Arabic and Italian press in East Africa highlighted every compliment that the colonial government had received from the Muslims of Ethiopia and from Arabs visiting Italy's colonies. In spring 1938 the visit of prominent East African Muslims in Rome and their meeting with Mussolini was publicized during the Arabic programme of Radio Bari.[81]

The people of the Middle East were largely unaware of the difficulties Italy encountered in its attempts to stabilize its rule over Ethiopia and of

the harsh measures adopted by the Italian army against the Abyssinian population. Some reports on Italian atrocities filtered through to the Middle East. For instance, in early March 1937 the *Palestine Post* published an item picked up from Reuters about the barbaric reprisals that followed the attempt on Graziani's life in February.[82] Nonetheless, these acts did not receive the same level of attention that Italian repression in Cyrenaica had received a few years earlier, possibly because the victims in Ethiopia were neither Arab nor (in most cases) Muslim. Fascist efforts to improve the status of the Muslims in Ethiopia earned Italy favourable coverage in the Middle Eastern press. On 28 May 1937, for example, the Palestinian daily *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* published an article praising the way Muslims were treated in the Italian colonies compared to the maltreatment of their brethren in other parts of Africa.[83] On 21 August 1937 The Syrian *Alif-Ba* published an interview with the *Qadi* of Addis Ababa, who spoke of the Muslims' devotion towards Italy. Under the Negus, he said, the Muslims were oppressed: positions in public offices or the military were unattainable; they were forbidden to build mosques; and Islamic teaching was obstructed. However, under the Italians things had changed. He saw the government's funding of the pilgrimage to Mecca as a first step on the way to re-connecting Ethiopian Muslims with their co-religionists in the rest of the world.[84] Another manifestation of this 're-connection', which suited the goals of Italian foreign policy, was the concern showed in East Africa for the plight of the Palestinian Arabs. In autumn 1937 Muslim notables in Ethiopia publicly condemned the British policy of repression in Palestine. Furthermore, funds were raised by Muslim communities across Italian East Africa for the benefit of the Arabs in Palestine.[85]

Italian officials were willing to spend money not only on encouraging favourable coverage in the Middle Eastern press but also on preventing the publication of negative reports. For example, in December 1936 the Consul General in Jerusalem, Count Quinto Mazzolini, informed Rome of the pending publication of a special issue of the Jaffa daily *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, dedicated to an attack on Italian colonialism in Abyssinia. Mazzolini persuaded the owner of the paper, Sulayman al-Taji al-Faruqi, to destroy the 7,000 copies that had been prepared and the Consul General agreed to cover the related expenses. As *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* had received payments from Italian sources in the past, it is possible that its owner intended to make use of Rome's sensitivity to bad press and of the generosity of Italy's representatives in order to make a profit.[86] While the Italians encountered tremendous difficulties in subduing their East African empire, they found it relatively easy to

create a favourable image of how the Muslim community in Ethiopia had been revitalized under their rule.

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In Libya the pro-Muslim policy pursued by Balbo since 1934, continued at full speed. On 31 May 1935 a royal decree was published by the government authorizing the establishment of a 'Superior School of Islamic Culture' in Tripoli. The school was to provide the colony's religious magistrates without having to rely on the graduates of Al-Azhar in Cairo or the Islamic University of Tunis.[87] Balbo consulted Arab notables before taking steps that affected the Muslims. On 14 September 1935 Radio Bari publicized a letter written by Muslims in Libya to Mussolini, praising Italy's efforts in maintaining a high level of hygiene in Muslim schools.[88] A few days later the Governor of Libya announced the construction of nine mosques and the re-opening of a further five. He also decided to renovate the sanctuary of Sidi Rafa in Cyrenaica. At the end of October 1935 an illustrated monthly in Arabic, *Libiya al-Musawwarah*, began to appear in Benghazi.[89] Balbo arranged for sheep to be bought in Tunisia to replenish Libyan herds which were nearly wiped out following severe droughts. During his governorship Libyan deportees were offered money to return from Egypt. Italian representatives in Palestine and Tunisia also assisted in the repatriation of Libyan exiles.[90] Libya remained tranquil throughout the Ethiopian War, enabling the Italian army to divert more forces to East Africa. Moreover, Libyan troops deployed in Somalia and Eritrea took part in the Ethiopian campaign – a fact that was much appreciated by the Fascist leadership.

During the second half of 1936 the Press and Propaganda Ministry prepared and later disseminated throughout the Middle East a publication titled 'What Italy is doing for Islam in Africa'. The publication was an improved version of 'This is what the League of Nations does not wish to see' which the Italians had used during the early months of 1936. But unlike its predecessor, the new publication contained only 'positive' (pro-Italian) propaganda. It was printed on high-quality paper and contained several photos with captions in French, English, German, Spanish and Arabic. The photos showed mosques constructed or repaired by the Italians in Libya, Eritrea and Somalia; new schools, hospitals, markets and avenues that were built throughout the *Impero*; and Italian contributions to the infrastructure and agriculture of its colonial domains. Copies of this publication were distributed in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq from late 1936 until early 1938.[91]

Another of Balbo's innovations in Libya, which was utilized to increase Italy's prestige in the Middle East, was the *Gioventù Araba del Littorio* (GAL). This paramilitary youth organization, which was established in August 1935, attracted at its height approximately ten per cent of all Libyan male adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18. Enrolment to the organization was voluntary and free of charge. GAL took charge of its members' moral, physical and military education while respecting Muslim holy days. In the spring of 1936 several hundred Libyan youths were sent on an official visit to Rome. On 24 May they took part in the celebrations marking the anniversary of Italy's entry to the First World War. During this event Mussolini inspected a column of GAL members.[92] Photos commemorating the visit as well as an article in Arabic describing the history and purpose of GAL were included in a publication titled 'The Fascist Youth'. In February 1938 copies of this publication were distributed to Italian representatives across the Arab world.[93] Libya was gradually turning from a source of embarrassment for Italian foreign policy in the Middle East to a source of pride.

One of the main peaks of Italy's pro-Muslim policy in Libya was Mussolini's second visit to the colony in mid-March 1937.[94] The climax of this journey was a ceremony in Tripoli, orchestrated by Balbo, on the afternoon of 18 March. A Berber chief named Yusuf Kerbish approached Mussolini who sat on a dark stallion and presented him with the 'Sword of Islam' (which was actually made in Florence, especially for the occasion) in the name of 'the soldiers and the Muslims of Libya'. Amid cheering crowds the Duce raised the sword up in the air (an equestrian statue of Mussolini holding the sword of Islam was later erected in Tripoli).[95] After the ceremony the Duce addressed the crowds, declaring that 'Fascist Italy intends to ensure the Muslim populations of Libya and Ethiopia [that they will have] peace, justice, well-being, respect for the laws of the prophet'. He also spoke of Italy's *simpatia* for Islam and for the Muslims of the entire world.[96] Charles Burdett has observed that written and photographic descriptions of the event seemed to promote 'the idea that both ruling and subject population appreciated a common conception of masculinity and shared a common cult of leadership'.[97] Mussolini also paid a publicized visit to a mosque in Derna, while the Italian media symbolically crowned him as the 'protector of Islam'.[98] The Duce thus followed the path taken by previous ambitious European leaders. In 1798 Napoleon, whom Mussolini admired, declared in Egypt that the French were 'true friends of the Muslims'.[99] A hundred years later Kaiser Wilhelm II declared in Damascus that '300 million

Mahometans who live scattered throughout the world' should know that 'the German Kaiser will be their friend for all time'.[100] Much like his two predecessors, Mussolini's claim to be the protector of Islam proved to be both opportunistic and short lived.

The Fascist propaganda apparatus tried to capitalize on Mussolini's visit, using it to increase Italy's prestige in the Muslim world. More than 300 Italian and foreign journalists accompanied Mussolini during his visit to Libya. One of them – the Syrian editor of *Al-Jazira*, Tayasir Zabiyan al-Kaylani – interviewed the Duce, who emphasized Italy's pro-Muslim policy in Libya and Ethiopia as well as its 'respect for the independence and integrity' of the Arab countries.[101] Radio Bari gave an account of this interview and the Italian Foreign Ministry instructed its representatives in the Arab world to give it publicity. Palazzo Chigi asked to be informed of 'the reactions in local circles to the interview granted by the Duce to the Syrian journalist.'[102] Dino Alfieri, the Minister for Press and Propaganda, accompanied the Duce in Libya and his subordinates distributed pamphlets in Italian and French among the foreign journalists, praising Fascist Italy's friendship with the Muslims and contrasting the tranquillity in Libya with the disorders in Palestine and other Arab countries.[103] In May 1937, shortly after the visit, Lessona told the Chamber of Deputies in Rome that 'To Islam we have proved our sympathy, preserving full liberty of religion, respecting its institutions and its judicial order. This attitude and this action have not only strengthened the devotion of our Moslem subjects but have also attracted the sympathy of others outside our territories.'[104]

Italian propaganda tried to foster an idyllic picture of Fascist colonial rule in Libya which was beneficial to the indigenous population. Within this context it would be of use to briefly analyse *Lo squadrone bianco* (1936), one of the few films from the Fascist period to address Italian colonialism in Libya. Based on a novel by Joseph Peyré, the director Augusto Genina showed the transition of a bourgeois and slightly decadent young Italian officer into a brave Fascist-type leader of native soldiers under the hot Libyan sun. The film presents a very paternalistic image of Italo-Arab relations. 'Here the example you set is what counts', the young officer is told soon after his arrival. The Libyan troops are depicted as loyal and quick to serve. Some of them even speak pidgin Italian. The more senior and experienced officer of the outpost speaks a bit of Arabic and, having handpicked his men, is admired 'like a pharaoh'. The climax of the film shows a fierce battle scene in which the Italian officers and their troops fight against unruly rebels. Though the battle is intense and the senior officer is killed in

action, the Italians prevail. Theoretically, the film portrayed precisely the sort of image the Fascist regime would want to project. It presented the redeeming role colonialism could play to salvage Italian masculinity and bravery as well as how content the Libyans were to serve under Italian leadership. Even the battle scene depicts a fairly evenly-matched struggle with the rebels, and shows none of the brutal methods the Italians had employed to suppress the Sanusi revolt. However, by the late 1930s any mention of past discords between Italy and the Arab world was anathema to the regime. Therefore, when the film was sent to Egypt in late 1937 Mussolini and Ciano were very annoyed with the Ministry of Popular Culture.[105]

It was sometimes difficult to maintain the delicate balance between colonial interests and foreign policy goals in the Middle East. For instance, in May 1937 Mazzolini in Jerusalem suggested granting Arabs from Palestine free access to the agricultural and crafts schools in Italian Africa. He also thought it advisable to allow Palestinian Arabs to enlist in the Italian colonial army and to allow them to enrol in the School for Islamic Culture in Tripoli. By doing this, he argued, Italy would be giving 'tangible proof' of its favourable policy towards all Muslims. Furthermore, such a step would enhance Italian penetration in the region and would counter any British propaganda against Italy.[106] The answer he received reveals much about the motives behind Italian policy. In the official response sent to Mazzolini in late October 1937, Balbo wrote that

> Libya has known perfect tranquillity only for a few years owing to the methodical and continuous work of the government in these regions. To bring to Tripoli a group of young people coming from a country – like Palestine – which is passing through a period of grave and continuous agitation motivated by a spirit of independence […] would undoubtedly be dangerous.

Lessona agreed; Italy should avoid allowing 'disturbing elements to penetrate our Libyan environment', which has already been fully pacified. In late December of that year the Palazzo Chigi received a similar response from the Governor General of Italian East Africa, who deemed it unwise to admit Palestinian labourers to his colony.[107] Propaganda aside, whenever colonial interests clashed with those of foreign policy, the former usually prevailed. Italian propaganda, as the next section will show, could endeavour to incite the Middle East, but not at the cost of destabilizing Italy's colonies.

The propaganda war with Britain

The Ministry for Press and Propaganda (renamed Ministry of Popular Culture in May 1937) kept a close watch on developments in the Middle East. Italian diplomatic representatives in the region increasingly corresponded with the ministry, notifying it of how Italy was portrayed in the local press and asking for propaganda material to be sent.[108] Italian propaganda aimed to reach as wide an audience as possible. In June 1936, for example, Alfieri instructed Italy's representatives in Syria and Lebanon not to neglect the Christian Arabs despite the pro-Muslim policy.[109]

The effort to appeal to a wide audience was evident in Italy's radio transmissions in Arabic. In 1934 Radio Bari's newly launched programme in Arabic was 15 minutes long. By December 1937 it had been extended to last 40 minutes.[110] Part of Radio Bari's success was due to its high standard of entertainment. The station employed popular Arab singers. According to a British report, the famous Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum was invited to Italy and was offered 'a substantial salary', though the visit failed to materialize.[111] The Ministry of Popular Culture was willing to invest funds to ensure that Radio Bari's Arabic transmissions were and would continue to be received favourably. In autumn 1937 Dr Enrico Nuné, the chief editor of radio news in Arabic, travelled to Alexandria, Cairo, Jerusalem, Beirut and Damascus. The aim of his journey was to develop radio programmes directed at Arab countries. He returned with suggestions for improvements on a variety of issues such as music, interviews and news. He also recommended that the programmes of Radio Bari be made available in an illustrated monthly magazine in Arabic.[112] Some of his suggestions were adopted and in January 1938 the first monthly issue of *Radio Araba di Bari* appeared.

Written in both Italian and Arabic, this publication included summaries of the main items aired by Radio Bari in recent times. The items in the first issue can roughly be divided into three groups. The first included justifications for Italy's policies in Europe (Italy leaving the League of Nations and the relations between Mussolini and Hitler). The second consisted of items related to the progress of new Italy (Italy's demographic policy, agricultural studies in Italy, tourism in Italy and 'Italy after 15 years of Fascism'). The third group dealt with Italy's pro-Islamic and pro-Arab policy ('Italy and Islam', 'the historic relations between Italy and the Arab world', 'Libya under the governorship of Italo Balbo', 'Italo-Yemeni friendship', 'Dante and the Arab language',

'the Arabic language in Italian schools', 'Islamic studies in Italy', 'the orientalist Carlo Alfonso Nallino' and 'Rome and Cairo'). By 23 January 1938 the Jaffa daily *Filastin* was able to quote extensively from the first edition of this magazine.[113]

Another reason for the relative success of Italian propaganda during this period was its ability to tap into the growing resentment in certain sectors of Arab society towards British policy in the Middle East. This was done through various channels. In March 1937 a Cyrenaican weekly published an article praising the Italians for bringing progress to Libya. According to a formal British complaint, the article contrasted Fascist colonies with those of 'other colonial Powers' and made the statement that 'the [native] population of Australia had been reduced from twenty million to twenty-five thousand by massacre and neglect' and that 'wealthy India had been reduced to poverty and misery by colonists who sucked her blood while the Indian people are dying of hunger.' Copies of the newspaper were distributed in Jeddah by the Italian legation. The British embassy in Rome complained about this article, but was told by the Italians that 'In Libya preventative censorship does not exist.'[114] British policy was also criticized by Radio Bari. It told its listeners that 'There is cooperation throughout the Arab world against the democratic powers … There is a unified front against Great Britain and France on the whole coast from Turkey to Egypt'. In the hope of alerting public opinion in the Arab world to the extension of British control in south-western Arabia, Radio Bari pointed out that the British air force was bombing Muslim women and children in Hadramawt. The station also drew the attention of its audience to an article by St John Philby in the journal *World Review*, criticizing British policy in south-western Arabia.[115]

British officials were concerned over 'the weakening of Great Britain's position in the Eastern Mediterranean owing to the general native interpretation of Italy's successful Abyssinian adventure and to Spanish developments.'[116] London was not indifferent to Italy's anti-British propaganda campaign. Having ruled out jamming Italian radio transmissions in 1935 and having frustrated any hope of moderating Rome's propaganda by way of diplomatic protests, the British were left with a third course of action.[117] In the spring of 1937 the Foreign Office exerted pressure on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to start transmitting in languages other than English, including Arabic. Eden also supported the construction of a medium wave station in Cyprus, free 'from the restrictions which attach to the use of a station in mandated territory'.[118] Eventually, in the autumn of 1937, all the relevant

departments reached an agreement on initiating Arabic transmissions from the BBC's World Service station in Daventry.[119]

Broadcasts in Arabic from Daventry started on 3 January 1938. It was hoped that by transmitting only objective news, the station would establish a reputation for reliability. Much to the dismay of British officials in the Middle East, one of the first news items to be aired was an execution of an Arab rebel in Palestine. The international press soon portrayed the competition between Bari and London as a 'radio war'.[120] For example, a *New York World Telegram* headline from January 4 announced: 'British Lose Radio Fight with Italy'. The paper quoted United Press correspondent in Jerusalem, Jacob Simon, who listened to the first broadcast in a village café. The villagers told Simon 'Daventry's commentator mixes English with Arabic. Bari's does not utter a word of Italian during the Arabic hour.' When the British station began playing classical music the villagers tuned out in favour of Bari, which played a song by the famous Egyptian singer Muhammad Abd al-Wahab.[121] On January 9 *Filastin* reported that Mussolini had encountered the British Ambassador to Rome at the opera and asked him jokingly for the latest Arab news from the radio station in London.[122]

Despite initial setbacks, the British were unrelenting. Eden wanted to 'bring home to the Arabs how the Italians are behaving' and consequently British representatives in Tripoli, Benghazi, Addis Ababa and Djibouti were instructed to report 'any information which may reach them respecting Italian action against Muslims.'[123] However, George Rendel's earlier comment – 'we may find in the end that we are less well placed for carrying on the campaign than our adversaries'[124] – seems to have been predictive. The Italian side was certainly better prepared for a confrontation of this sort. As early as 6 October 1936 Ciano wrote to his diplomatic representatives in Baghdad, Cairo, Jeddah, Kabul, Beirut, Jerusalem, and Aden and asked them to produce for him documents that could strongly illustrate the 'inhumane conduct of the English towards Arabs and Muslims in territories under British influence or dominion'.[125] In April 1937 Ishaq Darwish, a relative of the Mufti of Jerusalem, handed Casto Caruso of the Italian Foreign Ministry Cabinet some photographs depicting violent acts committed by the British in Palestine. In November of that year Mazzolini sent the Ministry of Popular Culture several such photos, some of which were published in *Il Tevere* on Mussolini's order.[126]

On 16 March 1938 a British press officer in Jerusalem wrote that it is 'becoming increasingly clear that the service from Daventry is not listened to regularly here.' A few days later he reported, 'The Arabic

music and general entertainment is merely a laughing matter, and is compared – much to its disadvantage – with the Bari programme.' The BBC did its best to improve its performance. A new announcer was hired and a large number of Arabic music records were purchased.[127] Eventually, the 'wireless war' was settled by a truce once Bari watered down its anti-British tone in March 1938, so as not to interfere with the negotiations that preceded the Easter Accords.

Throughout the period examined here, Italian representatives in the Middle East as well as officials in Rome were confident regarding Italy's image in the Arab world. Shortly after his return from Mecca in late March 1937, the Mufti of Jerusalem told Count Mazzolini of his satisfaction when meeting Muslim pilgrims from Tripoli and Harar, all of whom praised the Italian government. He also stated that the Duce's visit to Libya was received with 'much satisfaction' in the Arab world.[128] On 15 May 1937 the Vice-Consul in Alexandretta reported that the *Luce* newsreel showing Mussolini raising the Sword of Islam was received with enthusiasm by Arab and Armenian crowds.[129] Rome embraced such positive reports and disregarded hostile reactions in the Arab press and elsewhere, leading Ciano to state that 'Every day there reaches us from the most distant lands evidence of the impression produced by the event in the whole boundless Islamic world, which, in accordance with its traditions, loves in the *Duce* the wisdom of the statesman united to the action of the warrior.'[130]

The reports that Rome was receiving from Palestine are a case in point. In May 1937 Mazzolini reported receiving some 25 letters a day requesting assistance in finding work in Italian East-Africa, in obtaining Italian citizenship, in enrolling in the Italian armed forces and in studying in Italian universities. He told his superiors that 102 Palestinian Arabs had asked to be sent as labourers to Italian East Africa. In June 1937 residents of a small village in northern Palestine contacted the Vice-Consul in Haifa and appealed for 'Italian protection' against a British decision to destroy their village.[131] Palestinian leaders, who were in secret contact with the Italian Foreign Ministry, informed their counterparts that King Ibn Saud as well as leading politicians in Syria, Palestine and Iraq were prepared to embark on an open pro-Italian policy. This was precisely what the Italians wanted; they encouraged the Palestinian Arabs and the Syrians to make a public appeal to the Saudi and Iraqi kings to turn to Italy, and possibly also to Germany, and to call on the Axis to make efforts on the Arabs' behalf.[132] That this did not take place is a sign that Palestinian assurances and the resulting Italian perception were somewhat over optimistic. However, as the next section will show, Italian confidence in the success of its policy towards the Middle East was not entirely unfounded.

Reactions: Is the enemy of my enemy my friend?

In December 1937 King Ibn Saud told Reader Bullard of the British legation in Jeddah that 'no one could have believed a year ago to what extent Mussolini would induce the Arabs to look upon him as their champion.'[133] How did this come about? To a certain degree the growing discontent among Arab leaders and masses with British policy in the Middle East and especially in Palestine played a major part in the relative growth of Mussolini's popularity. However, there was another important factor involved. In the period following the Ethiopian War Italian representatives in the Middle East as well as the *Agence d'Egypte et d'Orient* continued to provide articles, photos and funds to newspapers across the region. Italy's investment in its pro-Arab and pro-Muslim policy was beginning to pay off.

The Middle Eastern press continued to host a variety of opinions regarding Fascist Italy, but the general tone seems to have been more sympathetic than it was during the Ethiopian War. In Syria and Lebanon the dailies *Alif-Ba, Al-Jazira* and *Al-Bilad* published favourable articles on Italy and its colonies throughout 1936 and 1937. The editors of the latter two had visited Italy and were receiving publications from Rome on the Fascist regime and doctrine.[134] In Iraq reactions to Mussolini's visit in Libya were mixed; the paper *Sawt al-Shab* covered the event favourably while *Al-Bilad* and *Al-Ahali* criticized the Duce for following in the footsteps of Wilhelm II. They reminded their readers of the atrocities committed by the Italians in Libya.[135] Jalal al-Awf, the editor of the Palestinian daily *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, was one of the foreign journalists who accompanied the Duce on his voyage to Libya. He was later invited to Rome where he interviewed Mussolini and met with the Minister for Press and Propaganda, with whom he discussed the possibility of future cooperation. On his return to Palestine, Awf met with Mazzolini in Jerusalem and told him he was very pleased with the honour with which Mussolini had received him. Mazzolini in turn was very pleased with the manner in which *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* was attacking Britain and showing a sympathetic attitude towards Italy.[136] On 19 May the paper published an article which, according to a British observer, 'extolled Mussolini and his Islamic policy in almost obsequious terms.'[137] The paper's strong anti-British approach led the Mandate authorities to suspend it for seven weeks. Following this Awf appealed to the Italians for a 'financial contribution'. In June of that year Awf, who was a native of Syria, was deported from Palestine.[138]

Pro-Italian coverage in the Arab press in Palestine, which was fairly limited throughout 1935 and during the first half of 1936, was now extended beyond the immediate circle of Husayni's supporters. In fact, Mazzolini was confident that most of the Arab press in the country supported Italy.[139] For example, in June 1937 the Christian-owned *Mirat al-Sharq* published a series of articles praising Mussolini, his defiance against Britain and his 'generosity' towards the Arabs. While in the past the Arabs hated Italy now, according to the paper, they admired it. Indeed, it would come as no surprise if Italy were to replace Britain in the Orient. 'The star of Italy is in ascent and that of England in descent.'[140] In this context it is interesting to examine the position of the Jaffa daily *Filastin* which had led the anti-Italian campaign in the Palestinian press before and during the Ethiopian War. In November 1936 the paper called on the Arabs to form an alliance with Italy. The change in its position was rationalized thus:

> The Arabs do not trust Italy and even hate it. However it is certainly possible to negotiate with Italy and to reach an agreement. […] Friendly relations with the Arabs will insure for her [Italy] the control of the other shore of the Red Sea and over the essential supply routes to the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Nothing in the world would be worth more to Italy than such an agreement, and despite the Arab detestation towards her an agreement with her should be signed. This is the only possibility the Arabs have in their struggle against Britain.[141]

In the course of the next two years *Filastin's* coverage became much more favourable towards Italy. In 1938 the paper gave detailed information on speeches delivered by Mussolini and reported his daily activities. Articles on Italian topics received large headlines. *Filastin* published more photos of events in Italy and Germany than in the western democracies.[142] While the transformation in *Filastin's* position may have been a means of expressing an anti-British stance, it is also possible that Italian funds contributed to it.[143] Regardless of its underlying reasons, the distinction between the attitudes of the Mufti-led majority and the Palestinian opposition towards Italy, which had been apparent in 1935, was no longer visible in 1937.

In Egypt Italy's 'publicity campaign' was less successful than in its northern neighbours. Although the anti-Italian atmosphere of 1935–6 had died down, Italy had few admirers among Egyptian opinion makers. After Mussolini received the 'Sword of Islam' the popular *Al-Musawwar*

published a caricature showing an old sheikh on camel-back facing Mussolini and telling him that Allah is the only protector of Islam. *Al-Ahram* pointed out that the Arabs never asked for Mussolini's protection and that Muslims no longer considered the mere building of a mosque as a mark of friendship towards Islam.[144] A Cairo newspaper editor referring to the Sword of Islam incident told Elizabeth Monroe, 'Protector of Islam indeed … we have heard that before. Napoleon said it here, and so did the Kaiser at Damascus. It's a bad precedent.'[145] At best, Italy enjoyed a more cautious approach from a local press that was trying to guess where Fascist policy was heading. In April 1937 *Al-Ahram* published an article titled 'Italy and the Arabs – a new orientation in Fascist Policy'. The paper congratulated Mussolini on his pro-Arab statements and on his intention to support the abolition of the capitulations regime in Egypt at the forthcoming Montreux Conference. However, the paper pointed out that the Duce's rhetoric was not free of 'lies, deceit and hypocrisy'. While the pro-Muslim policy in Libya might pave the way for smoother colonial domination it was, nevertheless, still an act of an imperialist power serving its own interests. The burden of proof, the paper concluded, lay on Italy.[146]

The extent of Italian involvement in Arab affairs was such that it was used for the purpose of internal struggles in Egypt and elsewhere. On 22 June 1936 the Prime Minister, Nahhas Pasha, announced that the Ministry of the Interior had obtained proof that the Young Egypt Association was being funded by and was acting in the service of a foreign power against the national interests of Egypt. The local press was quick to identify the 'foreign power' as Italy. The Italian Minister in Cairo, Ghigi, denied any complicity and lamented the fact that Italy's name had become a pawn in the internal politics of Egypt. The leaders of Young Egypt went on a public campaign to refute the accusations, claiming that Nahhas and the Wafd were trying to tarnish their reputation, and even attempted to take legal action.[147] Similar allegations were made by the press in Lebanon and Syria against the authoritarian *Parti Populaire Syrien* led by Antun Sa'ada. The Beirut paper *L'Orient* claimed that Radio Bari publicized the activities of this party while the French authorities in the Levant also noticed with concern an increasing number of references to it in Italian broadcasts. However, the Italian consulate in Damascus denied any connection to this movement. Rome was informed by its representatives that Sa'ada was more pro-Nazi than pro-Fascist and that the party's popularity was very limited.[148]

Italy's image and its policies were received differently by different sectors in the Middle East. In Palestine, the Duce received favourable

coverage in the Arab press. Moreover, as the next chapter will show, prominent Palestinian Arab leaders willingly collaborated with Italy. The Jews, on the other hand, were deterred by the links forged between Italy and Nazi Germany. In Iraq the Sidqi *coup* and the short-lived improvement in relations with Italy illustrated that certain circles within the Iraqi army had definite authoritarian tendencies. In Yemen the age-old Italian policy of courting the traditional leadership and providing it with material gains paid-off as the renewed treaty of friendship demonstrated. However, in other parts of the Middle East pro-Italian tendencies were restricted to more peripheral elements of society. In Syria and Lebanon Italy gained some admirers but without achieving the elaborate high-level contacts that existed in Palestine. Italy's success in Egypt was even more limited. In Arabia Ibn Saud remained suspicious of Italy and refused to commit to a pro-Italian policy. As we shall see later on, Italy's relative success in promoting its image in the Middle East between spring 1936 and spring 1938 was temporary. The 1936 estimation of the Sudan Government Intelligence Officer, E. S. Attiyah, that 'the majority of thinking people in these parts [Egypt, Palestine and Syria] view with apprehension the possibility of a British eclipse, and would still be prepared to support Great Britain in any conflict between her and the Fascist Powers, provided a solution of the Palestine problem could be found acceptable to the Arabs' was proved by time to have been accurate.[149]

Conclusions

In the aftermath of the Ethiopian War Italy emphasized its support for Arab independence in the Middle East. Until the Easter Accords of 1938 Rome placed itself on the side of Arab nationalists and against Britain. Italian expansionist desires did not disappear but were subtly channelled to unthreatening avenues such as commercial relations and treaties of friendship. At the same time the Italian military continued to plan for a war which would inevitably involve the Middle East. Developments in Europe, such as the establishment of the Rome-Berlin Axis and the Italo-Yugoslav treaty of 1937, enabled the Italian government to focus much of its attention on Mediterranean matters.

During the period examined in this chapter Italy succeeded in harnessing its pro-Muslim attitude in Libya and East Africa to further foreign policy goals in the Muslim world. For a while Rome was able to present a coordinated and coherent policy to the countries of the Middle East. This was happening at the same time as Britain was experiencing problems in dealing with the Arab Revolt in Palestine.

Both Britain's difficulties and Mussolini's pro-Muslim policy account, at least partially, for Italy's relative success in gaining adherents in the Middle East.

After the Second World War the Mufti of Jerusalem justified his (and other Arabs') support of the Axis by saying that 'after all, your enemy's enemies are your friends'.[150] This seems to be an over-simplistic explanation, even if only because it was not shared by all those who opposed Britain's policy in the Middle East. While some Arabs saw Italy as providing a possibility to further their independence, others did not believe that one imperialist power would be any better than the other. Furthermore, Fascist Italy's temporary popularity did not result solely from its rivalry with Britain. Despite the uneasiness that this notion might create today, in the 1930s some Arabs viewed the Fascist pro-Muslim policy favourably. While much of the pro-Italian coverage in the Middle Eastern press might have been induced by Italian funds, it is doubtful whether a large segment of the media could have kept on publishing material which was unacceptable to its consumers. Finally, Italian policy was greeted with satisfaction only as long as it was perceived as being pro-Arab. As we shall see, from 1938 onwards Italian policy, despite still being anti-British and anti-French, was no longer seen as benefiting the Arabs and Mussolini's popularity in the Middle East declined accordingly.

4
Italy and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–9

> once they have taken arms, peoples will never lack foreigners to help them.
>
> (Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XX)

On 19 April 1936, following a number of sporadic acts of inter-communal violence, an Arab crowd attacked Jews in Jaffa sparking disturbances that spread across much of Palestine. Within a few days the leaders of the main political parties and organizations founded the Arab Higher Committee, headed by the Mufti of Jerusalem, and announced a general strike. Unrest among the Arabs of Palestine had been brewing for quite some time. The increasing influx of Jewish immigrants from Europe into the country (more than 60,000 in 1935 alone) and the continuous purchase of Arab lands by Jews were a cause of constant concern for the nationalist Arab leadership. The Arabs in Palestine were also envious of their Egyptian and Syrian neighbours, who seemed to be on the verge of achieving their independence. At the same time Britain appeared to be weak; it was unable to stop Italy from conquering Ethiopia on the one hand and acquiesced to Egyptian demands following violent demonstrations on the streets of Cairo (November 1935) on the other.[1]

The events in Palestine provided Rome with both an opportunity to pressure Britain into recognizing the new Fascist *Impero* and a means of increasing Italian political penetration into the Middle East. Two separate historical processes – the Palestinian Arabs' struggle for independence and Rome's ambitions in the region – crossed paths. Rome perceived Husayni as one of the most prominent nationalist leaders in the Arab world.[2] Therefore, the Mufti's appeal for Italian assistance in obtaining money and arms did not fall on deaf ears. In previous

chapters we have seen how the Fascist regime adopted a pro-Muslim approach and how Italian policy in the Middle East became anti-British. This chapter shows how Italy tried to exacerbate Britain's difficulties in restoring law and order in Palestine. It examines the mechanisms of Italian involvement – the financial support that the Palestinian Arab leadership received from Italy and Rome's attempts to supply arms and other forms of military assistance to the rebels in Palestine. It then analyses the Fascist leadership's formal position vis-à-vis the Palestinian Arabs as well as references to the revolt in Italian propaganda. Finally, it examines the ways in which the Palestinian Arabs viewed Italy's assistance and propaganda.

The tale of the secret fund

In September 1940 Ciano met the German Ambassador to Rome, Hans Georg von Mackensen, to discuss Axis policy in the Middle East. During their conversation, Ciano stated 'that for years he had maintained constant relations with the Grand Mufti, of which his secret fund could tell a tale'.[3] Indeed, the financial assistance afforded by the Fascist regime to the Arab leadership in Palestine was to prove the most tangible form of Italian support during the revolt.

Italian sources paint an incomplete picture of the payments made to the Mufti and his associates before autumn 1936. In January Husayni asked the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem, De Angelis, for a grant of £100,000. This sum was to help in the financing of 'actions in Palestine and Transjordan'. In a meeting between Mussolini, Suvich and De Angelis that took place on 31 January, the Duce approved this payment. It was agreed that this should be carried out 'immediately so as not to continue the relationship with us [and thus] compromise it during the period of agitation'. Despite Mussolini's approval, Palazzo Chigi informed Husayni he would only be granted £25,000, of which he received approximately £12,000.[4] In June the Mufti renewed his request for a further £75,000. De Angelis, who was nearing the end of his tenure in Jerusalem, argued the Palestinian Arabs' case in Rome. On 9 July 1936 he wrote a long memorandum to Ciano, who had just been appointed as Foreign Minister, imploring him to agree to Husayni's requests. De Angelis reported that, before he left for Rome, the Mufti had asked him to 'tell Signor Mussolini that I have committed myself to the struggle because I believe in his promise and in his support'. To this the Consul General added that, in his opinion, aiding the Mufti was an Italian interest. Some two weeks later De Angelis warned Ciano that turning down the Mufti's request might jeopardize the relationship that had developed

since 1933 and might also alienate Ibn Saud and certain political circles in Egypt.[5] Ciano was at first reluctant to enter into a costly commitment. He wanted to maintain relations with the Mufti but felt that the figure of £75,000 was too high. He told De Angelis he would reconsider if the request was reduced to £5,000 or £10,000.[6]

A slightly different account of Italian payments made during the initial stages of the revolt in Palestine emerges from British sources. According to a Royal Air Force intelligence report, submitted on 11 November 1936, 'up to the present' Italy had spent £75,000 in Palestine: £57,000 through Ihsan Jabiri; £3,000 through Shakib Arslan; and £15,000 through De Angelis. However, not all these funds reached their destination. Shakib Arslan had told an official from the Italian Foreign Ministry that some of the money had been 'misappropriated either by Jabiri or by De Angelis or by both of them'. De Angelis reportedly stated that between 1933 and the early part of 1936 he had provided Jabiri with 'over 3,000,000 lire (roughly £40,000)'. Of these the Arab leadership in Palestine had only received £17,000. The report went on to say that, if Arslan's allegations could be confirmed, De Angelis might be 'charged with misappropriation of public funds.'[7]

This version of the events can only be partially corroborated by Italian sources. Ihsan Jabiri certainly received money from the Italians. As early as autumn 1935 he had already been given 1,740,000 Italian lire (approximately £23,000).[8] The first mention of allegations against De Angelis appeared in late September 1936 and subsequently the Mufti was asked to state how much Italian money he had received thus far. In October an official from the Foreign Ministry did indeed meet with Arslan in Geneva, and in November Ciano was warned that, in light of the 'accusations made against De Angelis', more stringent methods of control were necessary if further funds were to be given to the Mufti of Jerusalem.[9] In December 1936 Major I. Berionni of SIM was sent to Syria and Palestine on a secret mission to which we shall return later on. One of his assignments was to conduct an inquiry into the dealings of Jabiri and De Angelis. In connection with this objective, Husayni told Major Berionni that until October 1935, he had not received any Italian money and since then he had received £52,578. The Italians had in fact spent more than this on fomenting the revolt in Palestine, though Berionni was not yet able to say who was responsible for the discrepancy between the sum allocated and the one received.[10]

By the summer of 1937 the identity of the guilty party was already known. In August Dr Enderle was in Geneva to meet with Jamal Husayni and Awni Abd al-Hadi, both members of the Arab Higher Committee. Enderle was able to learn from them some interesting details about

the embezzlement committed by Ihsan Jabiri.[11] Abd al-Hadi informed Enderle of a commission of inquiry that had been set up to look into Jabiri's wrongdoings. It turned out that Jabiri had taken some £25,000 from the funds intended for Palestine (though it is not clear whether all this money emanated from Italian sources). Enderle was told that Jabiri had also been recklessly indiscreet in a manner that compromised the activities of the Committee. Jabiri, who disappears from the Italian record at this point, returned to Syria in June 1937, having been pardoned by the French, and was appointed as governor of Latakia.[12] Meanwhile, responsibility for the secret fund passed into more trustworthy hands.

Enter Musa Alami

September 1936 marked an important turning point in the relations between the Fascist regime and the leadership of the Palestinian Arabs. Against a background of increasing Italian involvement in the Civil War in Spain and a closer relationship with Nazi Germany, Foreign Minister Ciano began to take an increased interest in the revolt in Palestine. On the Arab side the role of the coordinator with the Italians was assumed by Musa al-Alami, a Cambridge-educated lawyer, who served as a government advocate and as a private secretary for the High Commissioner, Arthur Wauchope, advising him on Arab affairs.[13] Alami was a respected figure in Arab circles (his brother-in-law was Jamal Husayni). He had also maintained good relations with Zionist leaders such as David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok. In June 1936 – three months before assuming responsibility for contacts with the Italian Foreign Ministry and SIM – Alami met with Shertok and denied that Italian money was fuelling the revolt:

> I do not understand what is the point of your [the Zionists'] permanent emphasis on the fact that the Arab movement is nourished by Italian money. First of all I tell you it is a lie. Perhaps I do not know everything that goes on in our camp, but this much I do know. If it turns out that we do have Italian money it would be a great surprise for me.

Shertok's response – that the Palestine government and British Foreign Office also spoke of Italian funds reaching the Arab leadership – elicited this reply from Alami:

> You have to understand the soul of the Arabs. People live with the feeling that they are sacrificing their blood and there is no bigger

> insult for them than the accusation that they are doing it for Italian money. I would really ask that you cease to talk of Italian money.[14]

A few months later Alami went to Switzerland on the pretext of sick leave. On 9 September he met with an Italian Foreign Ministry official in the northern Italian town of Cernobbio. Alami informed his counterpart that he had come to Italy in order to give the Duce a letter from the Mufti and to ask urgently for considerable and continuous aid to the Palestinian cause in particular and the Arabs in general. Within days he received a first payment of £13,000. On 26 September he was received by Ciano in Rome and repeated his objectives as defined by the Mufti. Alami was worried that without immediate help, the 'movement' in Palestine would not hold out for more than 15 days.[15]

For the next two-and-a-half years Alami remained the key Palestinian Arab contact for the Italians. He appears to have been a very competent liaison officer. No complaints were made about mishandled funds after his arrival on the scene. The level of secrecy he maintained was very high. Proof of this is the fact that his name did not appear in any publication on this topic before the mid-1980s when the secret 'Gabinetto' documents were first made available to the public.[16] It is perhaps revealing that Alami spoke unfavourably of Ihsan al-Jabiri, who was his father-in-law. Already during his initial contacts with the Palazzo Chigi, Alami insisted that both Jabiri and Arslan should 'never' be informed about his actual contacts with the Italians. Alami was let down at least once by these two, when they made public their meeting with Ben-Gurion, which he helped to set up, despite their assurances of secrecy.[17]

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From September 1936 onwards, payments to the Palestinian Arabs were logged and handled by SIM agents and Foreign Ministry couriers. One can assume that both the Italians and the Arabs wished to have tighter control over financial arrangements following the misappropriation described above. The new Italian Consul General in Jerusalem, Count Quinto Mazzolini, who arrived in Palestine in September, was kept in the dark regarding the secret contacts with the Arab leadership. The secrecy was such that in May 1937 Mazzolini passed on to the Foreign Ministry a report written by the Vice-Consul in Haifa, warning that the local police were searching for two or three Italians who were rumoured to have assisted in arms smuggling into

the country. The report illustrates that the Italian representatives in Palestine were unaware of the methods by which the secret contacts were maintained.[18]

During the second half of November 1936 Alami was back in Italy. He met with SIM agents in Venice to devise a scheme for transferring money and future methods of communication. From that point onwards money would only be given at pre-arranged meetings to persons approved by Alami: Ishaq Darwish (a relative of the Mufti) and Muhammad Afifi. The Italians would write to Alami after each meeting in order to notify him of the amount paid and Alami would write back to confirm its receipt. Letters would also be used in order to schedule future rendezvous in various European cities. The system included the use of agreed-upon code names (which would change from one letter to the next) and double envelopes.[19]

An encoded correspondence, mostly in French, developed. Letters from Italy would be sent to a Mr Husni Sawaf at the American University of Beirut, while letters from Lebanon would be sent to a post office box in Rome. The Italian Foreign Ministry kept copies of all incoming and outgoing letters. Below is a typical example:[20]

> Dear George [Alami], 30.1.1937
>
> I have sent you, through your friend that I have seen [Darwish], 10 meters of the silk you were expecting [£10,000]. Let me know if you have received them and if they suited your taste. On the first occasion I will send you 20 more meters. As you know my father has given his approval for a trip in Europe. […] I would like to stop in Nice for a few days. Let me know if I will be able to meet there some friends of yours and if you know a good hotel. The 'Hotel Negresco' has been recommended to me. Do you think it advisable? I have seen the other day our friend doctor Hawfman [Casto Caruso]. He told me he had been invited to Palestine, and will go there next March.[21] Please let me have news from yourself, my friend, and remember me as cordially as I always remember you.
>
> Truly yours,
> Charles

In September 1937 Alami met with a Foreign Ministry official once again. The two updated the code names used in the correspondence: 'Jamil' for Caruso (the person assigned by the Foreign Ministry cabinet for this task), 'Antoun' for Alami, 'Abib' for Jamal Husayni and 'David'

for Darwish. They also agreed on future rendezvous locations in hotels in various European cities as well as in Beirut and Damascus.[22]

However, soon after this meeting, the secret method for transferring funds had to be changed. In October 1937 British authorities dissolved the Arab Higher Committee following the assassination of the Acting District Commissioner of Galilee, Lewis Andrews. Most of the Palestinian Arabs' senior leaders were arrested and deported to the Seychelles. Amin al-Husayni (officially no longer 'the Mufti of Jerusalem') and after him Jamal Husayni escaped to Beirut. During the same month Musa Alami was relieved of his official duties in the Mandate government. He too relocated to Beirut.[23] In November he notified the Italians that he was having difficulties travelling to Europe. He suggested that future meetings take place in Cairo or in Damascus and asked to be introduced to the Italian Consul in Damascus in order to facilitate future contacts. Afifi, speaking on Alami's behalf, also requested a double-sided briefcase to help smuggle the money from Syria to Palestine. Such a briefcase was indeed produced by SIM.[24]

On 31 December 1937 the new Italian Consul in Damascus, Vittorio Castellani, was instructed to return to Rome 'due to important and urgent family matters' in order that he might be consulted in person. He was informed of the secret relationship with the Palestinian Arab leadership. From this point onwards, Castellani would receive the money in hand-delivered packages from Italy. He would then meet Darwish in pre-arranged locations in Beirut and pass the packages on to him. Because the Italian Consulate in Damascus did not have a cipher, the format of all possible telegrams relating to these deliveries was agreed upon in advance.[25]

In 1937 British intelligence was unable to work out how or indeed if Italian money was reaching the rebels.[26] In November 1937 the British Consul in Damascus, Mackereth, told Eden that, beyond rumours, he had not been able to 'obtain concrete evidence' on money reaching 'Palestine agitators' in Damascus. He reported that the head of the French intelligence service in Syria shared this opinion. It may be that their focus on Shakib Arslan, who had come to represent 'the personification of the Italian Arab policy', threw the British off course.[27]

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In the spring of 1938 Italian payments were discontinued following the Easter Accords and a decision to suspend material assistance to the Palestinian Arabs (see below). Between June 1938 and March 1939

Alami made several requests for additional funds but to no avail. The table below (Table 4.1) summarizes all payments made by the Italians from Alami's arrival on the scene until the subsidies were suspended:

Table 4.1 Subsidies for the Arab Revolt from September 1936 until June 1938[28]

Date	Place of transaction	Courier	Recipient	Amount paid	Remarks
10 September 1936	Geneva	Trinchieri	Musa Alami	£13,000	Rome promised an additional grant of £75,000
5 October 1936	Lucerne	Trinchieri	Musa Alami	£10,000	Partially paid in Swiss Francs
19 November 1936	Venice	Trinchieri	Musa Alami	£10,000	
20 January 1937	Athens	Major Berionni	Ishaq Darwish	£10,000	
4 April 1937	Nice	Trinchieri	Ishaq Darwish	£20,000	
11 June 1937	Lucerne	Trinchieri	Jamal Husayni	£20,000	
11 September 1937	Lucerne	Trinchieri	Musa Alami [Was on leave in Carlsbad]	£5,000	Payment of £75,000 completed
26 November 1937	Milan	Trinchieri	Muhammad Afifi	£20,000	A new commitment; amount partially paid in dollars and smuggled in a double-sided briefcase
18 January 1938	Rome	Caruso, Moscato and Castellani	Ishaq Darwish	£10,000	Money smuggled in a double-sided briefcase
15 March 1938	Beirut	Castellani	Ishaq Darwish	£10,000	Partially paid in dollars
15 June 1938	Beirut	Castellani	Ishaq Darwish	£10,000	
				Total: £138,000	

However, the total sum was higher. Between 1935 and 1938 Italy spent at least £157,578 on fomenting the revolt in Palestine, without including the money embezzled by Jabiri. In Palestinian terms this was quite a significant amount. For comparison, in June 1936 Wauchope thought that an amount of £5,000 to £10,000 would suffice in order to pacify (or bribe) the Bedouin tribes in Transjordan.[29]

From the available sources it is impossible to determine how the Italian funds were spent. There was, however, a general air of discontent regarding the Mufti's handling of the funds at his disposal. In a private phone conversation in September 1936, Raghib Nashashibi, leader of the National Defence Party, told a friend that he was surprised to hear Husayni turning down a request by a local dignitary for 3,000 Palestinian lire. Husayni said that the Arab Higher Committee's treasury did not even have 100 lire. Nashashibi commented that 'as far as I know we recently received 50,000 lire. Where this sum disappeared and on what it was spent – the Mufti does not wish to answer.'[30] During Ciano's conversation with the German Ambassador in Rome in September 1940, the Foreign Minister referred to the Mufti's 'secret fund': 'The return on this gift of millions had not been exactly great and had really been confined to occasional destruction of pipelines, which in most cases could be quickly repaired.'[31] It is perhaps worth pointing out that there is no evidence that the Italians attempted to instruct the Palestinian Arabs on how their money ought to be spent. Ciano either did not want to know what purposes the funds were serving (leaving room for deniability) or he simply did not care.

Attempts to supply arms

As early as September 1935 Ihsan Jabiri suggested to the Foreign Ministry that Italian arms be sent to Jeddah. From there, with the permission of Ibn Saud, they would be moved to the Transjordanian frontier. The Mufti could then wait for an opportune moment to ignite a revolt which would be based at first on Bedouin tribes and would then spread to the cities of Palestine. Jabiri presented a list of arms, which had supposedly been requested by the Mufti, including rifles, machine-guns, hand grenades and explosives for mines.[32] In light of the tension between Italy and Britain following the invasion of Ethiopia, the Palazzo Chigi was willing to consider Jabiri's request. Their main concern was to make sure that Italy would be able to deny any connection to the arms provided to the Palestinian Arabs. On 17 October 1935 it considered using weapons, which had been recently purchased abroad, for this purpose.[33] However, this plan was soon shelved.

At the beginning of 1936 the Mufti personally asked the Italians for 10,000 rifles and munitions as well as six anti-aircraft machine guns. The request was brought before the Duce who concluded that the arms and munitions ought to be sent without secrecy from Eritrea to Ibn Saud.[34] This decision was based on the assumption that Ibn Saud would officially order arms from Italy and would then allow a portion of them to be smuggled into Palestine through his kingdom, keeping the rest as commission. However, Ibn Saud was in no rush to submit such a request. In July 1936 De Angelis wrote that 'This sovereign is afraid that receiving arms provided by Italy might arouse English suspicion regarding his personal conduct.'[35]

When Musa Alami first arrived in Italy on 9 September 1936 he presented his hosts with a detailed list of requested arms: 10,000 rifles plus a thousand cartridges for each rifle; 5,000 hand grenades; 25 light machineguns and 12 heavy ones with ammunition; some mortars and mortar shells.[36] On 14 September Ciano passed this request on to General Federico Baistrocchi at the War Ministry. By the end of the month Ciano was able to inform Alami that the War Ministry had set aside 4248 Belgian rifles with 7,000,000 cartridges and 35 S. Etienne machine guns with 70,000 cartridges.[37] These arms and munitions were purchased in Belgium before the war in Ethiopia, apparently not for the use of Italian soldiers but rather to prevent their sale to the Abyssinians.[38] They were stored at the harbour of Taranto. In November 1936 some 25 tons of dynamite, 150,000 ignition devices and 150,000 meters of ignition fuse were added to the arms already there. All that remained was to work out how to smuggle these weapons into Palestine.[39]

In November 1936 the plan to transfer arms to Palestine via Hijaz was temporarily set aside. During Alami's negotiations with SIM agents an alternative route was devised: an Italian ship would take the arms from Taranto. Some four miles west of the estuary of the Litani River the ship would rendezvous with a local sailing boat which would unload the arms and take them to the Lebanese shore. From there the weapons could be smuggled by night into Palestine. The War Ministry Cabinet instructed the Director General of the Engineer Corps to prepare the arms in boxes that bore no indication of coming from Italy and whose weight must not exceed 30 kg. This was to be done by 12 December.[40] Major Berionni of SIM travelled to Damascus and Jerusalem from 10 to 28 December to meet with Alami and the Mufti and to discuss the details of this operation. A signalling system was worked out in order to allow the two vessels to recognize each other. The operation was scheduled to

take place on New Year's Eve, when the French and Lebanese coastguards and customs officers would presumably be preoccupied with other matters. However, Berionni eventually ordered the cancellation of the operation due to high seas, which would have delayed the unloading and a full moon, which would have endangered it.[41]

Shortly afterwards the Lebanese route was abandoned. On 25 January 1937 Ciano concluded that the consignment of arms should wait for the decision of Ibn Saud.[42] Between the middle of February and the middle of March of that year, Husayni was in the Arabian Peninsula for the annual pilgrimage. During his stay he had the opportunity to discuss various matters with the King. According to Ishaq Darwish, Ibn Saud had agreed that arms destined for Palestine would be shipped with other war materiel the King would purchase for himself in Europe. The ship carrying the joint cargo would then be allowed to land in Jeddah.[43] The Italian Foreign Ministry estimated that the British would, in all likelihood, learn of its arrival in Jeddah, but would not be able to trace the smuggling of arms through the Arabian Desert and Transjordan into Palestine. The Foreign Ministry was willing to consider the possibility that the arms be offered as a gift to the King, in order to weaken his resistance.[44] A note for Ciano from 23 April 1937 reveals the details of the planned delivery. Ibn Saud's agent, Khalid al-Hud al-Qargani, was to be sent to Europe to purchase arms. The same al-Qargani would contact Alessandro Ajello, a ship owner from Catania (in fact an agent of SIM), and ask for a vessel to transport the arms he had purchased. The weapons destined for the Mufti would also be loaded onto this ship, accompanied by a SIM agent. 417 pistols (Mausers and Steyers) were added to the original consignment.[45] The sources give no indication of whether the Italians advised the Palestinian Arabs on how and against which targets they would like these weapons to be used.

Parallel to the secret contacts with Palestinian leaders, the Italian government wanted to strengthen its ties with the Saudi Kingdom and was hoping to benefit from Ibn Saud's intention to purchase arms. From spring 1937 Italy was negotiating the sale of 10,000 rifles plus 10,000,000 cartridges to the Saudi government. Ciano was evidently hoping that the supply of weapons to the Palestinian Arabs would be accompanied by an arms deal with the Saudis. However, time went by and no agent of the Saudi King contacted Ajello, the SIM ship owner.[46] In July 1937 Alami assured the Italians that Ibn Saud intended to carry out the plan. He explained that Ibn Saud's personal agent, al-Qargani, had been very ill and was unable to travel to Europe. This was the reason why no request had been submitted thus far.[47]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, at the end of October 1937 the Saudi War Minister asked the Italian legation in Jeddah if they 'could spare or somehow obtain for him a consignment of Mauser rifles'. Ciano replied swiftly, instructing his representative to ask the Saudi Minister to specify the number of rifles and any other weapons he desired. The Saudi Minister was slow to respond. At this stage, Muhammad Afifi told the Italian Foreign Ministry that the Mufti was in desperate need of arms and was ready to reconsider a direct shipment which could be landed on the Syrian or Lebanese coast, somewhere between Alexandretta and Tripoli. Ciano rejected this suggestion.[48]

Finally, on 18 December Fuad Hamza, the Saudi Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, told the Italian Minister in Jeddah that Ibn Saud wished to buy ten cannon for his own army. He did not order any rifles, pistols or explosives, nor did he mention the smuggling of arms to Palestine.[49] Ibn Saud had no qualms about trading with the Italians or receiving their arms as gifts (as he had done when he was given a light tank in January 1936, three aircraft in June 1936 and 10 cannon in March 1938). However, the King was not willing to cooperate when it came to providing Italian arms to the Palestinian Arabs. This was due either to his fear of the British reaction or to his desire to prevent the Italians from gaining a foot-hold in Palestine or both. It seems the Italians failed to understand Ibn Saud's apprehensions over their ultimate intentions in the region. The Mufti and Alami also appear not to have taken the King's predicament into consideration.

On 31 May 1938 Ciano wrote to the Italian War Ministry that he no longer needed the arms which were being stored for the Mufti in Taranto.[50] This decision was probably taken following the signing of the Easter Accords between Italy and Britain (see below), which brought about the suspension of the Fascist regime's material assistance to the Palestinian Arabs. Thus the Taranto or 'Belgian' consignment never reached Palestine. As this was the only significant load of arms intended 'for the Mufti', Italy's contribution to the revolt in the direct supply of arms was negligible. On 19 November 1936 the courier Alfredo Trinchieri met Alami in Venice. Aside from £10,000 Alami was given two automatic pistols.[51] These were the only weapons directly supplied by Italy to the Palestinian Arab leadership that can be verified from Italian sources. British and Zionist suspicions that Italian arms were smuggled to Palestine through the Bay of Aqaba or by way of diplomatic mail arriving in Haifa, seem to have no corroboration. After several appeals to the Colonial Office, Wauchope gained permission to search the bags of the Italian Vice Consul in Haifa but could not find any incriminating evidence.[52]

The search for Libyan saboteurs and indirect military assistance

In his initial meeting with the Italians on 9 September 1936 Musa Alami asked not only for money and arms but also for assistance in the form of technical advisors. These men would help to carry out more efficient attacks on the petrol pipeline in northern Palestine and arrange for the water supply in Tel Aviv to be 'contaminated'.[53] On 26 September Ciano told Alami that Italy would be willing to provide the necessary 'material'. The request for men, however, would have to wait until the possibility of instructing Libyan non-commissioned officers to carry out these tasks had been examined. Mussolini personally approved this response.[54]

On 29 September the Ministry for the Colonies asked Balbo in Tripoli for Libyan non-commissioned officers to be entrusted with a task in Palestine, the nature of which was not specified. These men would have to 'have lived in Egypt and visited the Arab countries in the Levant. They must not be easily identified as Libyans, not even through their dialect'. This matter was to be kept absolutely secret. On 5 October Balbo was in Rome. He attended a meeting at the Palazzo Chigi which dealt with the question of sending Libyans to Palestine. The summary of the meeting in the Foreign Ministry pointed out that the risks involved in the operation outweighed its benefits.[55] However, later that evening Balbo was received by the Duce who may have viewed the matter differently.[56] Balbo returned to Libya and on 29 October informed Ciano that a certain Captain Kalifa 'possesses all the necessary qualities to carry out the mission'. Kalifa was serving in Ethiopia at the time and Balbo asked Ciano whether to have him recalled immediately or whether he should wait until his unit returned. As Ciano preferred that Kalifa be called back to Tripoli 'as soon as possible so he could begin his mission', Balbo promised that Kalifa should be back by Christmas and that he would be made available as soon as he returned.[57] The subject then suddenly disappears from the records. It partly resurfaced in July 1937 when, following a renewed request by Alami, the possibility of sending Libyan military instructors to Syria to train 'a dozen men loyal to the Mufti to act in Palestine and Kurdistan' was discussed.[58]

Concurrently and independently of Alami's request, the *Regia Marina* approached Ciano and requested information about the Iraq Petroleum Company pipelines that transported oil from northern Iraq to the Mediterranean through two branches – through Syria to the Lebanese port of Tripoli, and to Haifa via Transjordan. Cavagnari pointed out

that the oil pipelines had a military significance, since both the British and French navies depended on them. 'Acts of sabotage on the pipeline could, in the event of a conflict, cause grave harm to the naval forces' which relied on this oil. 'In order to study the possibility of future actions in this field [we] would be interested to ascertain exact data about the path of the pipeline and about the installations that serve it.' He asked for help in obtaining information through diplomatic sources and the Palazzo Chigi forwarded the request to its representatives in London, Paris, Baghdad, Jerusalem and Beirut.[59] In September 1937 a Foreign Ministry official asked Alami whether it would be possible to send an Italian naval intelligence agent to gather information on one of the pipeline's pumping stations with the assistance of a person trusted by the Mufti.[60] After this, the subject again disappears and the documentation does not state what came of Alami's or the navy's requests. It is possible that the Palestinian Arab leadership abandoned their plan or that Mussolini eventually ruled out the active participation of Italian military personnel in the revolt. Alternatively, the plan could have simply died out in the Italian bureaucracy.

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In April 1939 Mussolini and Ciano met Field Marshal Hermann Göring in Rome. According to the German account, when the conversation turned to the Arab world, Ciano:

> explained how Italy was aiding the Arabs. Direct supply was too risky; Italy was therefore giving them money and they had so far always succeeded in buying arms through Greek middlemen with the help of the funds thus received. The British, however, had now barred the way to Palestine so thoroughly that direct imports were impossible. But the import of arms was easier by the roundabout route of Syria.[61]

Nowhere in the detailed records from the Ciano era, is there any mention of Italian knowledge of where (outside of Italy) the Palestinian Arabs were purchasing arms and how they were smuggling them into the country. One cannot discount the possibility that, for whatever reason, Ciano was misleading the Germans (Italy had suspended its material assistance to the Palestinian Arabs several months before the conversation with Göring took place). It is possible that the Foreign Minister was trying to show the Germans that Italy knew how to handle

affairs in the Mediterranean, and especially in the Arab world, in order to discourage the Nazis from intervening there.

If we assume he was telling the truth, the following reconstruction might explain how Italian indirect assistance functioned. Throughout the period of the Ethiopian War various Greek companies and businessmen offered the Italian government the sale of various products despite the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations. The Italians accepted many of these offers and the merchandise was exported first to Albania and from there to Italy. SIM handled all these transactions.[62] It may be that these business deals created the connections which were later used to facilitate arms sales to the Palestinian Arabs. Vague hints of this can be found in Foreign Ministry sources. On 15 January 1936 the ministry's secret affairs cabinet recommended that an agent of the Mufti purchase the arms in a 'foreign market' using funds 'provided especially by us'. On 16 September of that year, having received the initial list of arms stored in Taranto, the Foreign Ministry considered 'providing for the acquisition of the rest of the material abroad'.[63] Alas, the available sources are insufficient to either corroborate or disprove Ciano's statement about indirect supply.

Italy's formal position

Soon after the disturbances in Palestine broke out, British allegations regarding Italian complicity began to appear. On 6 May 1936, for instance, Graham White MP asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the House of Commons if he could state 'the extent to which propaganda from Italian and other outside sources has been the cause of the recent disturbances in Palestine?'[64] The Italians denied such allegations. In an interview with George Ward Price of the *Daily Mail* Mussolini stated that Italy had no political interest at all in Palestine and that it was utterly false to ascribe to Italy any responsibility whatsoever for the disturbances or for any troubles there.[65] On 14 May 1936 De Angelis published a declaration denying allegations made in the Jewish 'anti-Fascist' press as to the responsibility of Italian agents for the disorder in Palestine. 'The Royal Consul General of Italy in Palestine and Transjordan' he wrote, 'is the only Italian agent in these countries'.[66]

The arrival of Alami in Italy in early September 1936 gave the Fascist leadership an opportunity to intensify their involvement in the revolt in Palestine. The Palazzo Chigi believed that the Mufti's insurrection posed a grave threat to British interests in the Middle East and should therefore be encouraged.[67] Alami not only requested money and arms but

also informed the Italians of a secret agreement which had supposedly been reached between the Mufti, Ibn Saud, the Imam Yahya of Yemen, the Foreign Minister of Iraq and three nationalist leaders from Syria. The objectives of this agreement were: to suspend Jewish immigration to Palestine; to replace the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan by a Wahhabi prince;[68] to further the independence of Palestine, Transjordan and Syria; and to create an Arab federation that would include Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan and the Arabian Peninsula. This federation would be anti-British and anti-French in character.[69] Alami did not reveal his reasons for divulging this information but it seems he was seeking Italian consent for the Mufti's long-term plans. The Italians were uncertain about the reliability of this information. Major Berionni of SIM was asked to use his visit to Palestine in order to gather information on the true state of affairs. His report was rather sceptical; he estimated that, for the time being, the only sign of inter-Arab cooperation was Ibn Saud's willingness to allow arms to be smuggled to Palestine through his kingdom (a plan which, as we have seen, did not materialize).[70] It may be that the Mufti sought to increase his importance in the eyes of the Italians by presenting himself as a pan-Arab rather than just a Palestinian leader.

In autumn 1936 the Fascist leadership explicitly expressed a desire to see the revolt in Palestine intensified. In a note to Mussolini, Ciano stressed that the periodical payments to the Palestinian Arabs should continue only 'if the Arabs maintain the present situation in Palestine [or] make it worse.'[71] This, however, was not what happened. In October 1936 the violence in Palestine decreased and the general strike was suspended, following an orchestrated appeal by the Arab sovereigns and the British threat to declare martial law. In November 1936 Berionni met Alami in Venice and informed him of the Italian desire to see the revolt revived. In January 1937 Berionni reported that the Mufti was 'disappointed at not being able to resume the revolution immediately and *in full strength*, as we wanted [original italics]'.[72]

In July 1937 Italy was faced with a dilemma regarding its official response to the Peel Commission report and the plan to divide Palestine between an Arab state, a Jewish state and a small British protectorate. A Foreign Ministry review of the matter concluded that it was in 'our interest to prevent the execution of this project'. Concern was voiced over the possibility that Britain would use the partition plan to establish a permanent military presence in Haifa (an outlet to the Mediterranean). The Palazzo Chigi was also uneasy regarding the fate of the Christian holy places which were regarded as Italian interests.[73] While its opposition to the plan was clear, the Foreign Ministry seems to have been divided on

how it should go about tackling the issue. Despite the promise of Radio Bari that 'Italy would make her voice heard' once the partition plan was transferred to the Permanent Commission on Mandates at the League of Nations, the Italian side was not prepared to meet this challenge.[74] Ciano instructed Mazzolini in Jerusalem to convey to the Arabs with whom he came into contact that Italy had not yet decided on its official course of action regarding the partition plan. He was also to make clear that this should not be interpreted as a sign of disinterest on Italy's part.[75] On 31 July 1937 Renato Bova Scoppa, the Italian representative in Geneva, conveyed a similar message to a delegation of Palestinian Arabs, headed by Jamal Husayni and Awni Abd al-Hadi. The Palestinian delegation wanted to secure Italy's support for its refusal to accept the partition plan. For this purpose Jamal Husayni was scheduled to travel to Rome on 13 August in order to meet with Ciano. Eventually, Husayni had to return to Palestine because his wife was ill and the meeting with Ciano did not take place.[76]

While political support for the Arab opposition to the partition plan was not made public at first, Italy had no qualms about secretly inciting the renewal of the troubles in Palestine. On 28 July 1937 Ciano advised Alami that 'politically' the best time to resume the revolt was the present, as Britain was preoccupied with developments in Spain and the Far East.[77] In September 1937 Rome was notified of the Mufti's intention to renew the violent campaign against the British and of his plan to have the Amir Abdullah of Transjordan overthrown. Upon learning of this, Mussolini approved an immediate payment of £15,000 and promised a further £5,000 once the revolt recommenced.[78] When the revolt was renewed in October 1937, the Italian press violently attacked British policy.

Only in February 1938, when Mussolini and Ciano published the famous *Informazione Diplomatica* n. 14, did Italy formally object to the idea of the creation of two states in Palestine inherent in the Peel Report. The international Jewish problem, they said, had only one solution: 'the creation in some part of the world, not in Palestine, of a Jewish state'. Radio Bari's Arabic programme publicized this announcement.[79] According to Ciano, the words 'not in Palestine' were added 'so as to save our relations with the Arabs'.[80] In the summer of 1938 Mussolini informed Ciano of his intention to settle the Jews in various parts of Italian East Africa as a concession for International Jewry. On 30 August the Duce remarked that a region in the north of Italian Somaliland 'has remarkable natural reserves that the Jews could utilize'. These included shark fishery, which was 'very advantageous because initially many Jews would end up being eaten.'[81]

But before Mussolini divulged these plans to Ciano, Italy was to undertake an important shift in its attitude towards Palestine. On 8 March 1938 Ciano and Lord Perth (Eric Drummond) began discussing the formula for Palestine as part of the preparations for the Anglo-Italian agreement. The British proposal for a formula was:

> His Majesty's Government desire to obtain from the Royal Italian Government an undertaking that they will refrain from any attempts to create difficulty for His Majesty's Government either *in the framing of policy for* or in the administration of Palestine [my italics].[82]

The Italians objected to this proposal. The phrase about the 'framing of policy' implied Italian abstention from interfering with the partition plan. The Director General for Europe and the Mediterranean in the Foreign Ministry pointed out to Ciano that the partition of Palestine contradicted the Mandate charter (which Italy had ratified) as well as the *status quo* in the Mediterranean required by the Anglo-Italian 'Gentlemen's Agreement' of January 1937. In addition, the Palazzo Chigi wanted to use the wording of the agreement regarding Palestine to safeguard Italy's prestige in the Arab world.[83] Eventually, the Palestine issue was settled in a 'verbal assurance' outside the formal Easter Accords. Ciano promised the British Ambassador that the Italian government would 'refrain from creating difficulties or embarrassments for His Majesty's Government in the administration of Palestine'. Perth, in turn, promised that the British government would 'preserve and protect the legitimate Italian interests' in the country.[84] The agreement seems to have been accompanied by an internal Italian decision to tone down anti-British propaganda, halt financial assistance to the Mufti and abandon the plan to supply the rebels in Palestine with arms. In late June and early July 1938, as the revolt in Palestine was reaching its climax, the Fascist regime considered renewing its support for the Mufti. However, the Duce and Ciano concluded that any renewal of assistance should 'wait for developments in Anglo-Italian relations'.[85] In the triangle of forces that governed Italy's attitude in the Middle East, policy had temporarily shifted closer to the side of traditional foreign relations considerations.

Despite the change of policy regarding Palestine, Italian relations with its Arab leadership were not severed. Rome wanted to 'maintain the position we have acquired' in the Muslim world.[86] Foreign Ministry officials continued to meet with Musa Alami during the second half of 1938 and the first half of 1939. On 25 January 1939, while Alami was on his way to the Round Table Talks in London (an attempt to find

a negotiated solution to the revolt), he met with an Italian Foreign Ministry official in Milan. He renewed the Mufti's request for material assistance, tried to interest his counterpart in anti-French activity in Syria and notified him of the 'notable' German activity in Palestine. The Italians expressed their interest and sympathy, but the decision not to renew payments remained unchanged. On 13 March 1939 the Italian official who met Alami in Geneva gave him a gold watch, which was purchased on Ciano's request. Alami was said to be very moved by this gesture.[87] Active collaboration between Fascist Italy and the exiled Mufti of Jerusalem was resumed during the Second World War.

The flexible propaganda tool

During the first two years of the revolt (spring 1936 until spring 1938) Italian propaganda regarding Palestine was in tune with the main objectives of the Mufti: it attacked British policy, criticized the Jews and undermined the Amir Abdullah by reporting that the uprising would soon spread to Transjordan. On 27 June 1936 Radio Bari stated that

> danger has become imminent in Trans-Jordania. It is greatly feared [in London] that the Bedu[in]s will rise in revolt to assist the Arabs in Palestine. Reuter reports that Whitehall has great confidence in Amir Abdullah, but nevertheless they admit that he exercises not much influence upon the Bedu tribes. Whitehall is very much afraid that Trans-Jordan might be infected by Palestine and start insurrection. 200 Bedu Sheikhs, who met in Amman to discuss the present situation in Palestine, were arrested.

On the same day Bari also reported that 'young Arabs attacked a Jewish bank in Damascus for refusing to give donations to the aid of Arab Palestine'.[88] In mid-September 1936 the Bari announcer said that the 'Palestinian Arabs were being killed by the local British authorities in order to protect the Jews.'[89]

The new round of violence, which erupted in Palestine in autumn 1937, was accompanied by an upsurge in anti-British Italian propaganda. *La Tribuna* of 19 October reported that Muslim leaders from Libya and Ethiopia publicly condemned Britain's policy of repression in Palestine. Four days later *Giornale d'Italia* published an article on a fundraising campaign which had been launched by the Muslims in Ethiopia for the benefit of their Muslim co-religionists in Palestine.[90] On 25 October *Il Popolo d'Italia* published a caricature showing two

soldiers stabbing a bound man representing Palestine. The title read: 'Mandatory Politics of the League of Nations'.[91] Radio Bari echoed the paper's 'horror at the harsh measures in Palestine' and also published false reports about the Allenby Bridge being destroyed and on troubles on the Transjordan-Saudi frontier.[92] On 10 December 1937 Bari announced that 'the troubles in Palestine are all the fault of the British themselves' and on 29 December it cited an interview with Shakib Arslan in *Messaggero* 'inveighing against the Palestine policy of Great Britain, who intend to set up a Jewish state under British protection'.[93] This orchestrated campaign prompted the Zionist leader Shertok to note in his diary that despite the shortage of paper in Italy and the limiting of dailies to six pages, the Italian press still found plenty of room to write large-scale reports on the situation in Palestine with big anti-British and anti-Zionist headlines.[94]

Radio Bari's attacks were not constant, but they were recurring. The anti-British tone would vary according to political considerations. For instance, at the beginning of July 1937 Eden asked Grandi to convey a personal request to Ciano to restrain Radio Bari from criticizing British policy surrounding the publication of the Peel Report. Such a move, he said, would 'improve the atmosphere of Anglo-Italian relations'. Later that month Ciano conveyed to the Mufti an assurance that the station's recent moderate tone did not signify a change in Italian policy and was merely a formal (and temporary) concession to the British.[95] In March 1938 Bari moderated its tone once again so as not to disrupt the negotiation of the Anglo-Italian treaty. The reduction of the anti-British aspects of the broadcasts of Bari may partially explain the decrease in the station's popularity in 1939.[96]

Arab reactions: Appreciation and scepticism

Arab reactions in Palestine to demonstrations of Italian support and propaganda can be generally divided into sympathetic and sceptical. Proof of Italy's prominent position in Arab thinking can be found in one of the pamphlets distributed by Fawzi al-Qawuqji who was, for a short while in 1936, the most prominent commander in the rebellion. This pamphlet, in the form of an address to the High Commissioner, stated that if the Arab demands were not met, 'He [Qawuqji] will bring the Iraqi army and all the Arab Peninsula and also the help of the Italians, who will attack the British bitterly.'[97] It is doubtful whether Qawuqji himself took this threat seriously. Three months later he would tell the German Ambassador in Iraq, Fritz Grobba, that the Arabs were distrustful of the

Italians because they intended to use the Arabs' land for their colonies.[98] Nevertheless, the pamphlet proves that at least some leading Arabs perceived Italy as a force that might intimidate the British.

Pro-Italian manifestations during the period of the revolt were common, but these usually appeared against a background of anti-British feelings. On 21 May 1937 Muslims in Palestine celebrated the anniversary of the birth of the prophet. On the evening before the festivities, a shop near the Jaffa Gate in the old city of Jerusalem was decorated with pictures of Mussolini, Adolf Hitler and King Ghazi of Iraq, as well as Italian and German flags.[99] The Italian Consul General, Mazzolini, reported receiving 'numerous requests' for more flags and pictures of the Duce, but despite his efforts and desire to assist he was unable to meet the demand. Italian flags and pictures of the Duce were hung in the centre of Haifa's market while similar scenes were reported in Bethlehem and Jaffa.[100] From Rome, Drummond reported to Eden that the Italian press was paying particular attention to this phenomenon. He drew London's attention to an article by Alessandro Mombelli in *Corriere della Sera* of 27 May that told of an 'Arab chief' who pointed at the picture of Mussolini and told the reporter: 'We admire with a feeling of sincere enthusiasm the head of Fascism for his humane comprehension of Islam, and his courage for having dared to rise before anybody else against the myth of British might.' In Jerusalem the High Commissioner was sceptical about the authenticity of this interview, pointing out that Mombelli was known to be an agent of the *Agence d'Egypte et d'Orient*, an organ of the Italian Press and Propaganda Ministry.[101]

During the revolt the majority of the Arab press in Palestine was hostile to Britain – as far as the government's censorship of the press permitted. It also published occasional articles in support of Italy.[102] Upon meeting Italian officials some Palestinian leaders, such as Jamal Husayni, head of the Palestine Arab Party, and Issa Bandak, the Mayor of Bethlehem, expressed their 'friendship and admiration' for Italy.[103] On the other hand, some Arabs were sceptical about the sincerity of Italy's policy. On 7 June 1936, fifty days into the general strike, the Jerusalem teacher and nationalist Khalil al-Sakakini wrote in his diary: 'up till now we have received no help from Italy or from Germany. We have only heard pretty words from them.'[104]

Some Arabs found British and Zionist insinuations that they were fighting on Italy's behest rather insulting. In 1938 the Christian Arab leader and historian George Antonius wrote, 'One of the most prevalent misconceptions is that the trouble in Palestine is the result of an engineered agitation', attributed among other things 'to the agents and

the subsidies of Italy and Germany'. This he emphatically denied: 'the rebellion today is, to a greater extent than ever before, a revolt of villagers, and its immediate cause is the proposed scheme of partition.'[105] *Filastin*, which was generally favourable towards Italy during the period of the revolt, likewise rejected the allegation that the Arabs were incited by Italian propaganda: 'as if we are cattle or naïve and senseless to a degree that we need Italy or another country to kindle our flame of nationalism.' The Arabs, the paper said, were aware that any manifestation of sympathy towards them was 'either a lie or a part of the imperialistic competition.'[106]

Italy was perceived as a power challenging British hegemony in the Middle East and as such it attracted adherents among the Arabs in Palestine. Key political figures maintained secret contacts with Italian officials while Italy enjoyed relatively favourable coverage by most of the Arabic press in the country. The support Italy received was usually motivated by political considerations, not ideological ones. Italian propaganda was successful insofar as it was able to tap into local political, social and cultural dispositions by criticizing British policy. Furthermore, the pro-Muslim image that Italy was trying to promote assisted in removing some of the hostility that the repression of the Sanusi revolt had created in the past. On the other hand, Italy did not enjoy unanimous support. Many Arabs were well aware of the contradiction between Fascist Italy's backing of Arab nationalism and Italian imperialism.[107]

Conclusions

The involvement in the rebellion was perhaps Rome's most explicit attempt to destabilize London's position in the Middle East, prior to Italy's entry to the Second World War. Indeed, before and especially during the rebellion in Palestine, Hajj Amin al-Husayni and his subordinates received substantial Italian financial support, a certain degree of political backing and possibly indirect assistance in obtaining arms. Italian propaganda endeavoured to incite the Arab population in Palestine against the British Mandate authorities and, to a certain extent, against the Jewish population. Until the summer of 1936 the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem played a central role in mediating between Rome and the leadership of the Palestinian Arabs. From September 1936 onwards, Italian assistance to the revolt in Palestine was coordinated directly from the Foreign Ministry and SIM headquarters in Rome. This change reflected a desire to maintain maximum secrecy and to avoid the misappropriation of funds.

What was the Fascist regime hoping to achieve by supporting the Mufti? Renzo De Felice has repeatedly asserted that Italy's Arab policy during the late 1930s was determined by and dependent on the state of Anglo-Italian relations.[108] In the specific case of Rome's involvement in the revolt in Palestine, the available sources seem to support his thesis. However, De Felice's view that the Arabs were merely pawns in Italy's 'Mediterranean game' is debatable. By blocking its assistance to anti-British movements in the Middle East and moderating its transmissions from Bari following the recognition of the *Impero* in the Easter Accords of April 1938, Italy was in fact not giving up its 'Arab card'.[109]

First of all, the assistance given to the leadership of the Palestinian Arabs was only one part of Italy's multi-sided policy in the Arab Middle East. It would be erroneous to equate 'the Arabs' with Husayni's faction of the Palestinian leadership. In addition, Italy's contacts with various Arab leaders (both in Palestine and beyond) were not severed in spring 1938. As the next chapter will show, only 'negative' anti-British activity was suspended, while the 'positive' side of Rome's policy – enhancing Italian influence in the Middle East – continued. Secondly, by giving Britain the impression that Italian meddling in Palestine had stopped (most notably through the cessation of Radio Bari's anti-British propaganda), Ciano seems to have been indicating to London that Rome was adhering to the Easter Accords in anticipation of their ratification.[110] This was far easier an endeavour than, say, pulling out Italian troops from Spain. Moreover, Italy could always renew its assistance to the Palestinian Arabs, should it wish to do so.

What effects did Italian assistance have on the revolt? Italian involvement reached its peak between the autumn of 1936 and the spring of 1938. This period has been defined by one historian as the 'cease-fire' episode of the revolt.[111] By the time the rebellion came to its climax in the summer and autumn of 1938 the Italians had significantly toned down their involvement. Perhaps if the arms, which were stored for the Mufti in Taranto, had found their way to Palestine, Mussolini and Ciano would have been able to boast a substantial contribution to the revolt. But Mussolini seems to have cared little for the success of the revolt in Palestine. Despite presenting himself as 'the protector of Islam', the Duce did not mention the struggle of the Palestinian Arabs in his public speeches as Hitler had done on more than one occasion.[112] His main interests in the region were to weaken and maneuver Britain as well as to increase Italy's influence. Ironically, it was probably apprehension about Mussolini's desire to increase his influence in the Middle East that prevented King Ibn Saud from collaborating with the plan to smuggle Italian arms to Palestine.

It is difficult to estimate the exact impact Fascist policy had on the revolt of the Palestinian Arabs. The Mufti's message: 'Tell Signor Mussolini that I have committed myself to the struggle because I believe in his promise and in his support'[113], which was passed on at an early stage of the revolt, was no doubt flattering to Mussolini, but might not necessarily have reflected the truth. A comprehensive study based on Arab sources (if such sources exist), examining what occurred behind the scenes on the Arab side of the secret relations with Italy, still waits to be written. In any case, it is clear that the Mufti's decision to tie his fate to that of the Axis starting from the mid 1930s and continuing throughout the Second World War was to have dire consequences for his people.

5
Unattractive Policies, April 1938–May 1940

> Having broken the bars [of the Mediterranean prison], Italian policy can have only one watchword: to march to the oceans. Which ocean? The Indian Ocean, joining Libya with Ethiopia across the Sudan or the Atlantic going across French North Africa. Equally in the first as in the second hypothesis we will find ourselves faced by Franco-English opposition.
>
> (Mussolini, 4 February 1939)[1]

> I received many Albanian delegates who paid me homage. In reply I said that Italy will respect Albanian independence.
>
> (Count Ciano, 8 April 1939)[2]

In early 1938 Fascist Italy was clandestinely aiding the anti-British revolt in Palestine, negotiating the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia and Yemen, and conducting a propaganda campaign against Britain. The Chamberlain government, especially after the resignation of Anthony Eden, was eager to reach an agreement with Italy in order to improve its own position vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. Negotiations for an Anglo-Italian agreement began in March 1938. To a certain extent, Fascist subversive efforts had paid off, as Italy was now able to achieve recognition of its *Impero* and a semblance of parity with the British Empire.[3] Once negotiations were on their way and in the months that followed, Italian attention moved away from the Middle East and focused instead on developments in Europe and inside the Fascist Empire. Having temporarily set aside its subversive anti-British activity, the Fascist regime failed to adopt an alternative strategy to the one employed

between May 1936 and April 1938. In the absence of initiative, Italy's position in the Middle East was influenced by the repercussions of its colonial and European actions.

This chapter examines the effects of the Easter Accords on Italy's dealings with the Middle East and the setbacks Rome's pro-Muslim policy suffered as a result of Italian colonial, racial and expansionist policies. It analyses Italian attempts at political and commercial penetration in the Middle East during the last two years before Italy's entry to the Second World War as well as the changes in the priorities of Italian military planning during this period. Finally, it examines the attitude of Middle Eastern leaders and societies towards Italy within the context of the sharpening divide between the democracies and the dictatorships in Europe.

The Easter Accords and their aftermath

Issues related to the Middle East took up a large part of the negotiations, which began in Rome on 8 March 1938, and in the subsequent Anglo-Italian agreement. The Italian government was aware that Arab leaders, such as King Ibn Saud and the Imam Yahya of Yemen, were following the negotiations with great interest and expected Italy to act on the Arabs' behalf, particularly with regards to Palestine.[4] However, considerations relating to Italy's prestige in the Arab world had to be balanced against Italian imperialist interests. Whenever the two interests collided imperialist considerations prevailed.

Annex 3 of the agreement was dedicated to the Arabian Peninsula. Both sides felt that the Rome Agreement of 1927 was too obscure and somewhat obsolete. The Foreign Office felt that the old agreement did not safeguard Britain's position in the parts of Arabia under its suzerainty. Matters were further complicated by the fact that the negotiators of the previous decade 'completely overlooked the existence of the Anglo-Turkish Convention of 1914, establishing a boundary between the Turkish and British spheres in Southern and South-Eastern Arabia.' British officials believed, correctly, that the Italians were 'genuinely unaware [of the Anglo-Turkish agreement] at the time of the conclusion of the Rome understanding of 1927.' Meanwhile, the Italians were suspicious of the forward policy Britain adopted in the Aden Protectorate and had pressed for new discussions regarding Anglo-Italian relations in the Arabian Peninsula as early as 1934. As we have seen, in 1937 Italy complained that British policy in the Hadramawt was at variance with the terms of the Rome Agreement of 1927. They objected to the conversion of 'a loose

collection of independent tribal States' into 'a highly-organised Crown colony', which might seriously alter the strategic situation in the Middle East. Once negotiations began, British officials admitted that 'The discussions on these various points were at times extremely difficult' and that 'some of the Italian arguments had a good deal of foundation'.[5]

Eventually, the Italians were forced to recognize Britain's control over southern Arabia which they were powerless to reverse. In the agreement Italy declared that it would not seek to acquire any political influence there. In return Britain promised not to recruit locals for military service, save for policing duties, and not to build military installations with the exception of defensive ones. Presumably with an eye to maintaining their prestige in the Arab world, the Italian negotiators extracted a statement that, as far as security requirements permitted, Britain 'intends to maintain the autonomy of the Arab chiefs' under their protection. Both countries agreed to honour the independence and the integrity of Yemen and Saudi Arabia, stated that peace between the two neighbouring Arab countries was a common interest, and promised not to try to obtain political privileges in them.[6]

The islands of the Red Sea also warranted the attention of the negotiators, as the status of some of them had changed since the 1927 Rome Agreement. The Farsan Islands had been annexed by Ibn Saud along with Asir in November 1930. The status of the other islands – Jabal al-Tair, Zubair, Jabal Zuqar and the Hanish group – remained 'indeterminate'. Nonetheless, the Italians established posts manned by *askaris* (colonial troops) on Great Hanish and Jabal Zuqar in December 1929. Britain maintained administrative control over the Island of Perim and the Island of Kamaran which was used as a quarantine station in connection with the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina.[7]

In the Easter Accords Italy gained *de jure* recognition for Italian presence on the Hanish Islands and on Jabal Zuqar for the purpose of protecting the fishermen who frequented them. The location of these islands, northwest of the Yemeni coastal town of Mokha, did not command a strategic position comparable to that of the Island of Perim which is situated in the middle of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Therefore, officials in the Italian Foreign Ministry suggested to Ciano that a clause should be added to the agreement, guaranteeing free entry, passage and exit through the Red Sea. This, they argued, would prevent the possibility of the British using their privileged position near the straits of Bab el-Mandeb, either to block passage through them or to erect fortifications near the Aden-Yemeni frontier, a few kilometres from the Sheikh Said peninsula. Ciano turned down this suggestion, providing a very unclear argument.

Such a clause, he said, would limit Italy's ability to employ submarines in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.[8] In the agreement Italy recognized the presence of British officials at the quarantine on Kamaran and in return was given an assurance that Britain would help facilitate the presence of an Italian medical officer on the island. Both countries undertook not to erect fortifications on the Red Sea Islands.[9] The formalization of Italy's position in the Red Sea constituted an achievement of minor military importance. Unlike Kamaran and the Farsan Islands, landing on Jabal Zuqar and Great Hanish was impractical.[10] Nonetheless, a minor extension of Italian territory was better than none at all, even if this meant reverting to the earlier policy of a creeping, leaf-by-leaf territorial expansion.

During the negotiations the British asked for a reduction in the size of the Italian garrison in Libya. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 limited the number of British troops in Egypt to 10,000 at times of peace and London was concerned over the superior number of Italian troops across the border. In the course of the negotiations Ciano showed Lord Perth a copy of instructions, which had been sent by Mussolini to Balbo on 30 March, telling him that withdrawals of a thousand men per week 'were to begin at once'. When the agreement was signed Ciano reaffirmed the Italian promise to continue withdrawing troops from Libya at the same rate until the garrison reached peacetime level, numbering half of its present size.[11] However, he did not state the exact number of troops stationed in Libya at that time nor exactly how many would remain there once the withdrawals were completed.

Acting in support of French interests, the British negotiators tried to extract an Italian assurance of disinterest and non-interference in Syria. However, Mussolini would not hear of France being brought directly or indirectly into the conversations and the Syrian issue was thus left out of the final agreement. Ciano was willing to give a private assurance concerning Syria, similar to the one he had given regarding Palestine, but insisted upon it not being made public. The British wanted the French to be informed of this but Ciano refused.[12]

The only item which the Italians asked to add to the agenda of the negotiations was the Suez Canal. The Canal, on which Italy's ability to communicate with its East African empire depended, was close to Mussolini's heart. In his famous speech in Milan in November 1936, during which he proclaimed the existence of the Axis, the Duce pointed out that when the Italian Luigi Negrelli planned to cut up the Isthmus of Suez, the English considered him to be out of his mind.[13] In January 1937 *Il Popolo d'Italia* published an article written by Mussolini dedicated to the Suez

Canal. The biggest project of the nineteenth century, Mussolini wrote, was designed by Italians and built with the help of Italian technicians and labourers while the British opposed the scheme. Palmerston told parliament in 1857 that he had tried his best at Constantinople to have the project cancelled.[14] Italy had political and commercial grievances regarding the management of the Canal. Despite the fact that Italian ships counted for 20 percent of the traffic going through the Canal, a volume second only to Britain's share, no Italian official was allowed to become a member of the administrative council of the Suez Canal Company. Rome also complained of the high tariffs that ships passing through the Canal were required to pay, an amount that went far beyond covering the costs of maintaining the Canal. Nonetheless, Ciano was aware of Italy's inability to force a change either in the personnel of the Canal Company or in tariffs through the Anglo-Italian negotiations.[15] What he sought was a prestige achievement which would emphasize the supposed parity between the British and Italian empires.

During the negotiations the Italians wanted a reaffirmation of the Constantinople Convention of 29 October 1888, guaranteeing free passage at all times through the Canal, as well as a statement that 'the Suez Canal is an essential means of communication between the United Kingdom and British territories overseas and between Italy and Italian territories overseas.' However, the British Ambassador in Cairo and later the Egyptian Prime Minister both objected to this formula. Lampson was afraid that the Italians would ask to share in the defence of the Canal. Eventually Ciano agreed to drop the controversial statement and Annex 8 of the agreement became a simple reaffirmation of the Constantinople Convention. The Egyptian government asked to be associated with the Anglo-Italian Declaration regarding the Canal as well as other parts of the agreement (such as the '*Bon-Voisinage*' section dealing with relations between Italian East Africa and the Sudan). Britain and Italy agreed to the declaration being communicated in its existing form to the Egyptian government in separate identical letters by Perth and Ciano.[16] It seems that Ciano was pleased to have an opportunity to manifest Italy's good intentions towards Egypt. As he would later note in his diary, 'any effort to weaken the ties between Egypt and London finds approval here.'[17]

The importance attached in the Easter Accords to the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula illustrated Rome's preoccupation with the routes of communication between Italy and its East African possessions. Needless to say, the agreement did not satisfy Italian aspirations regarding the Canal. The lack of Italian representation in the Suez Canal Company was one of the grievances presented by Italy to France during

the late 1930s. In January 1939 a *Luce* newsreel dedicated to the Suez Canal protested about the high tolls that Italian ships were required to pay.[18] As the next chapter will show, the Suez Canal was to play a central role in the Italian plans drawn up in 1940 for the post-war period.

Once signed, the Anglo-Italian Accord was not implemented for a further seven months, since the British government saw the settlement of the Spanish question as a prerequisite for the entry into force of the agreement. At this stage Mussolini was unwilling to make any concessions regarding the withdrawal of Italian troops from Spain. Developments in the Middle East enabled the Duce once again to put pressure on London. In summer 1938 the rebellion in Palestine reached its peak with Arab insurgents taking effective control of parts of the country. In July the British reinforced Palestine by more than two regiments, drawing on troops from Egypt. Soon afterwards, Mussolini ordered Pariani to double the size of the Libyan garrison from 17,000 to 34,000 men by September, a directive which ran contrary to the assurances given by Ciano to Perth in April. Salerno has argued, with hindsight, that the Duce 'insisted that Italy have two army corps in Libya – one facing French Tunisia and the other, Egypt – before the Sudeten crisis erupted into a general war.'[19] We cannot discount the possibility that Mussolini was hoping to build up a crushing superiority in troop numbers for the purpose of intimidation, capitalizing on Britain's difficulties in the Middle East, as well as to be prepared for any eventuality in case war broke out. To offset this threat the British government ordered some of the troops in Palestine to return to Egypt in early September.[20]

The Italian military was unprepared for a war with Britain and France in the Mediterranean in autumn 1938. While personnel, munitions and artillery were shipped to Leros, Tobruk and Benghasi to complete their readiness for war, reserves were not called up. In fact, Pariani did not begin to bring the Italian army up to a war footing until the third week of September. As pressure in Europe mounted Mussolini ordered more troops to be sent to Libya, since Balbo's forces were insufficient when faced with a potential confrontation on two fronts. During the height of the crisis the Italian navy drew up plans for a surprise attack on the Suez Canal, landing troops in Tunisia, attacking the *Malaya* battleship in the port of Haifa and blockading the port of Malta. Many aspects of these plans were unrealistic and based on out-dated intelligence.[21] Speaking to the Hungarian military attaché, Mussolini was hardly optimistic. 'War will be hard and long' he stated on 10 September. Prophesizing that the conflict would assume the character of a 'colonial and submarine war', the Duce was hoping to incite the

Arab-Muslim world against Britain and France.[22] Following the Munich Agreement the threat of war subsided. Mussolini's public image as a mediator in the Czechoslovak Crisis opened a window of opportunity for the implementation of the Easter Accords. They were finally ratified on 16 November 1938, after the Italians agreed to the withdrawal of 10,000 Italian 'volunteers' from Spain. On that day Mussolini remarked to Ciano that 'All this is very important … but it does not alter our policy. In Europe, the Axis remains fundamental. In the Mediterranean, collaboration with the English as long as it is possible. France remains out. Our claims are now specific towards her.'[23]

The anti-French tide began to rise shortly after the signature of the Easter Accords. In late April 1938 the French Chargé d'Affaires in Rome presented Ciano with a twelve-item agenda of French desiderata for an agreement with Italy. Rome, however, was in no hurry to respond to the French initiative. Moreover, on 14 May the Duce declared in a speech in Genoa that the Stresa front was dead and buried. In June Ciano encouraged the Turks to capture the Syrian *sanjak* of Alexandretta, stating that the French would be unable to respond. Even French recognition of the Italian *Impero* on 19 November 1938 did not produce an atmosphere for negotiations.[24]

In fact, shortly after the ratification of the Easter Accords the Italian government and press began to exhibit a militant anti-French line. Ciano gave a speech at the Chamber of Deputies on 30 November, speaking of the 'natural aspirations of the Italian nation' amid acclamations and shouts of 'Tunisia, Corsica, Nice, Savoy', which broke out in the hall. Speaking to the Fascist Grand Council later that day Mussolini outlined 'the next goals of fascist dynamism'. Many of his expansionist ambitions centred on French territory. On 17 December Ciano denounced the Franco-Italian agreement of 7 January 1935. On his way to Hungary the next day the crowds at Trieste greeted him with calls for 'Tunis, Corsica, Jibuti'.[25] Finally, on 26 March 1939 Mussolini gave a speech in Rome, telling the audience that the problems with France had a name: they were called Tunisia, Jibuti and the Suez Canal and these were making the gulf between the two countries unbridgeable. Foreign observers were at a loss as to what precisely Mussolini wanted from the French. André François-Poncet, the Ambassador in Rome, told his Foreign Minister in Paris that the Duce 'did not specify what exactly his claims were, or whether they were economic or territorial, or both.'[26] A British journalist, speaking to officials in the Italian consulate in Tunis in early 1939, noted that they 'knew as little as the world outside … what their claims [in Tunisia] precisely were.'[27]

Throughout the early months of 1939 Mussolini delayed accepting French *démarches* in the hope that the changing circumstances would provide the opportunity for greater gains. In private, the Duce was more explicit about his ambitions. Speaking to his son-in-law on 8 January Mussolini alluded to a policy of gradual Italian expansion at the expense of France. For Corsica he wanted 'autonomy, independence, [followed by Italian] annexation'. For Tunisia – a settlement for the Italian minority, autonomy of the Bey, and finally an Italian protectorate. He also sought substantial Italian participation in the administration of the Suez Canal. A few weeks later he fanaticized about waging war and beating France.[28]

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In November 1938 Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Egypt followed the British example and recognized Italy's *Impero*.[29] As a prestige agreement the Easter Accords had served their purpose. However, aside from this formal recognition the agreement brought almost no practical gains for Italy in the Middle East. The change in Italy's position vis-à-vis the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem constituted a rare exception. After the conquest of Addis Ababa Italy tried to bring both the Ethiopian monks and the properties of the Ethiopian Coptic Church in Jerusalem under Italian control. This move had two aims: to strengthen Italy's position as a Christian power in the Holy Land; and to assist in the efforts to bring the Coptic Church in Ethiopia under Italian domination. In July 1936 the Ministry for the Colonies instructed the Italian Consul General in Jerusalem to make contact with the community of Ethiopian monks in the city. Rome demanded that the Ethiopian real-estate in Jerusalem should pass to Italy as successor state. In places where ownership of properties was disputed, such as the convent of Deir al-Sultan on the roof of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Italy should back the Ethiopian claims against those of the Egyptian Copts.[30]

In his attempts to gain control over the Ethiopian monks and properties Consul General Mazzolini had to curtail similar attempts made by the exiled Negus. Selassie's family had long been involved in strengthening the position of the Ethiopian Church in Jerusalem, and Palestine was his first destination after leaving Ethiopia. Mazzolini attempted a policy of 'divide and conquer' to separate the community and the exiled Negus, making use of the fact that the monks themselves were divided along ethnic and tribal distinctions. However, an emissary of the Negus persuaded the Ethiopian monks to declare themselves autonomous and

outside of any lay intervention. The harsh repression against the Coptic Church in Ethiopia, following the attempted assassination of Graziani in February 1937, and the Negus' intervention resulted in limiting Mazzolini's success.[31]

During the negotiations preceding the Easter Accords, the Palazzo Chigi demanded an Italian participation in the settlement of questions relating to the holy places in Palestine (a point which was also important for the Vatican); the attribution to Italy of the *Cenacolo* (which the last Ottoman Sultan agreed to cede to Vittorio Emanuele III); and recognition that Ethiopian property in Palestine was to go to the Italian-controlled Ethiopian Coptic Church rather than to the Egyptian Coptic Church.[32] In reality only the latter demand was satisfied. Following the British recognition of the *Impero*, the real-estate belonging to the former government of Ethiopia passed to Italy. The monks were permitted to continue to reside there. Mazzolini had difficulties in penetrating the community, although he did receive the submission of several individual monks to the 'new church of Ethiopia' which the Italians established in 1938. A new superior for the convents was nominated by the Italians and he took office in April 1940.[33] However, when Italy joined the war in June 1940, the Italian consulate in Jerusalem was closed. The war and its outcomes reversed Italian attempts to control the Ethiopian Church and buried the hope of strengthening Italy's position in the holy places in Palestine.

The period between the ratification of the Easter Accords and the outbreak of the Second World War was one of transition as far as Italian policy in the Middle East was concerned. As Alan Cassels has pointed out, Italy's agreement with Britain was aimed, among other things, at driving a wedge between Britain and France.[34] However, Italian strategy vis-à-vis the French Empire did not have time to evolve due to the successive crises in Europe. As we shall see later on, the inability to formulate a new course resulted in Italy's Middle Eastern policy becoming the prisoner of Italian actions elsewhere.

Military planning changes course

While Mussolini, Ciano and some of their followers entertained ideas of expansion, the preparations of the Italian military were lagging behind. Ethiopia, where the Duce was hoping to raise a strong native army, proved difficult to subdue. Even its optimistic military commander, General Ugo Cavallero, admitted that Italian East Africa was far from ready to support a large-scale attack against the Sudan and Egypt.[35] Subsequently strategic planning in Rome revolved around Libya. In January 1938 Pariani

planned that, in case of war with Britain and France, Italy should remain on the defensive on the Tunisian frontier and launch an offensive against Egypt from Cyrenaica. The army general staff believed that in a European conflict between the authoritarian powers and the democracies, Italy's North African objectives should be to reach the Suez Canal while at the same time not to suffer setbacks on the western frontier of Libya or worse, lose Tripoli.[36]

Surrounded as it was by potential enemy territory from three sides, Libya was to a large extent dependent on supply from the sea. The military's working assumption was that Balbo would need ten divisions to carry out both defensive and offensive operations. Accordingly, the navy began a provisional study of the transportation and maintenance of army forces in Libya. Sea transport, which would face heavy demands and very great risks in the event of war, meant that the number of troops had to be kept to a minimum and compensated for by quality, armaments and motorization, and by recourse to permanent fortifications. Alas, naval facilities in Libya were not in good shape. As early as February 1938, the navy reported that Benghazi could only handle five to seven ships at a time, and that it lacked port defences against aerial and naval attacks. Tobruk needed quays, a protective breakwater and water tanks before it could be used to disembark major units. In March 1939 naval staff calculated that it would take between 77 and 101 days from the start of transport operations to get the army ready to launch an offensive into Egypt. These figures served to cool enthusiasm in Rome for taking the initiative in North Africa. As far as offensive operations in the Mediterranean were concerned the capabilities of the Italian navy were also limited. Little could be done against the enemy's bases at Gibraltar, in Egypt, Syria or Cyprus. Naval planners concluded that Italy would have to concentrate on defending the central Mediterranean, attacking the enemy's communications and preventing the linking up of his fleets.[37]

In May 1938 Balbo oversaw the largest manoeuvres to take place in Libya in the second half of the 1930s. Despite the bellicosity of the army general staff in Rome, the manoeuvres in Libya were of a defensive nature, with a French attack from Tunisia as their premise. The Easter Accords had temporarily reduced the likelihood of a confrontation on the Egyptian frontier whereas Balbo's military intelligence pointed to increased French preparations on Libya's eastern and southern frontiers.[38] XX corps simulated the invaders, dispatching the bulk of its force from near the Tunisian border along the coast towards Tripoli. At the same time one division was transported by air along with its vehicles and landed

in the Gebel region in south-western Tripolitania, also with the intent of advancing on Tripoli. To meet this threat XXI corps was transported from Benghazi and eventually managed to block the aggressor's two-pronged attack. One of the intentions of this exercise was to adapt metropolitan troops to Libyan combat conditions and to examine their co-operation with native troops. Balbo believed the manoeuvres to have been a great success.[39] Nonetheless, the tactical innovations that were introduced during the exercise – such as the aerial transportation and landing of a motorized division – were not incorporated into the military's strategic planning. Furthermore, the scenario that the manoeuvres simulated proved irrelevant when war finally broke out in North Africa.

In early 1939 Mussolini began to move away from Pariani's concept of taking the offensive in North Africa. In February he acknowledged that the defences on Libya's eastern frontiers were too powerful to surmount and therefore a confrontation with France would become an 'aero-naval war'. The pessimistic reports submitted by Balbo during the same month probably confirmed the Duce's shift away from the idea of a North African war. The colony had only about three months' supplies of petrol, rifle ammunition for ten days and artillery ammunition for six. Even the army had admitted that logistically the colony was far from ready to support autonomous military operations and that a complete solution to Libya's logistical problems would require over one billion Italian lire. As John Gooch has recently observed, the difficulties in preparing an offensive war in the desert, the realities of economics and the currents of international politics forced Mussolini's attention away from North Africa and back to the Balkans where 'he sought to profit from Germany's evident intention to crush Poland', by conducting a local war.[40] In early April 1939 Italian forces captured Albania (see Map 5.1) and from May until August Mussolini and Ciano prompted Italy's military leadership to plan an attack on Greece followed by a coordinated Italo-Hungarian move against Yugoslavia.[41]

Badoglio, who was never enthusiastic about the prospect of a North African offensive, seized the advent of war in Europe to have the Pariani plan shelved. In late August 1939 he instructed the army to concentrate on securing the defences on the Alpine and Tunisian fronts. He directed Balbo to ensure Libya's territorial integrity in the likely event that, once war broke out, the colony would be isolated from the metropole, since transporting large numbers of troops to North Africa would become difficult or impossible.[42] On 18 November 1939, after Mussolini dismissed Pariani, Badoglio told the Chiefs of Staff that if the French had invaded Libya from Tunisia in September, they would

Map 5.1 The Italian Empire after April 1939

have easily overrun the colony. In regard to Pariani's plans to invade Egypt, he stated that the idea of actions aimed at the Suez Canal was futile and that the planning of operations which did not correspond to reality was a waste of time.[43] Not surprisingly, when war came the task of conquering Egypt proved too great for Italian Libya.

The ebbing of the pro-Muslim policy

In the period between the Easter Accords and Italy's entry to the Second World War, Fascist attempts to enlist support in the Middle East through the pursuit of a pro-Muslim policy continued, though these attempts were by now past their peak. New Italian

achievements benefiting the Muslims were becoming rare and thus Italian propaganda was forced to recycle old material. On 11 November 1938, for example, Radio Bari transmitted a special programme in Arabic to mark the birthday of King Vittorio Emanuele. The broadcast repeated familiar themes such as: the King's visit to Egypt and his friendship with the late King Fuad, the Duce's visit to Libya, the safeguarding of Islam in Libya and in Italian East Africa, the good treatment the Muslims of Ethiopia were receiving under Italian rule in comparison to their oppression under the Negus and their being able to participate in the annual pilgrimage. The transmission stated that Italy's relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq and the other Arab countries were sincere and cordial and expressed the hope that they would always remain so.[44]

In Italian East Africa, the Duke of Aosta continued the pro-Muslim policy of his predecessor, though with less zeal. In 1938 some 1450 Italian subjects visited Mecca during the annual pilgrimage, with the Italian government covering most of the costs involved. In 1939 the number of pilgrims rose to 3,585. In addition, notable Muslims from Ethiopia were sent to visit Arab countries to publicize their good treatment by the Italians.[45] In January 1940 the Fascist regime organized and financed the pilgrimage of 500 Muslims from Harar, Eritrea and Somalia to Mecca. Fourteen Eritrean notables were given a free flight to Jeddah. As the war had brought about the near suspension of the pilgrimage Italian efforts earned the regime some favourable coverage in the Arab press.[46]

Setting these minor achievements aside, the absence of new initiatives meant that Fascist pro-Muslim policy was overshadowed by other aspects of Italian policy. Mass immigration to Libya, racial legislation and the conquest of Albania did not sit well with Mussolini's image as 'the protector of Islam' and thus earned Italy few supporters in the Middle East.

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In the heyday of Italy's pro-Muslim policy the achievements of Balbo in Libya were harnessed to further Italian prestige in the Middle East. During 1938 and 1939 Italian colonial policy in Libya underwent some changes which did not correspond with Italy's foreign policy objectives in the Muslim world. It is necessary to examine these changes in order to understand their effect on Italy's position in the Middle East.

1938 saw the beginning of a large-scale project that was to bring thousands of Italian farmers to settle in Libya. On 17 May Balbo announced his long-term plan for intensive colonization and soon preparations were under way: roads, aqueducts, houses and villages were built; fields were laid out; seeds, tools, and livestock were stockpiled. In Italy potential colonists went through a screening process. Finally, in late October 1938 a single convoy of ships carrying the *Ventimila* (20,000) Italian colonists sailed for Libya. Their transport and settlement, which were at public expense, received extensive media coverage in Italy and abroad. During the ceremony in Tripoli, celebrating the arrival of the new settlers, Balbo unveiled the equestrian statue of Mussolini holding the Sword of Islam in his right hand, and promised to respect and defend the rights of Libya's native inhabitants.[47]

In Rome there were those who believed that, thanks to Balbo's 'assiduous and intelligent work the authority of the Government was widely recognized and Italy's prestige had greatly increased among the native populations, who were not slow to demonstrate their loyalty and gratitude.' For others – such as Ciano and the Secretary of the Fascist Party Achille Starace – Balbo's fame and apparent success were cause for envy. Even the Duce may have seen the Air Marshal as a potential competitor.[48] As noted in previous chapters, until 1938, Balbo's conduct in Libya was in harmony with Italy's foreign policy towards the Middle East and with Mussolini's posture as the 'protector of Islam'. However, during 1938, certain aspects of Balbo's colonial agenda diverged from that of Mussolini and consequently the Governor of Libya was not allowed to execute some of the plans he entertained for the benefit of the Muslims of his colony.[49] Balbo sought to maintain local support for the regime despite the mass colonization scheme. During a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council on 26 October 1938, he proposed to grant full Italian citizenship to the Arabs of Libya. The proposal was met with fierce opposition from the former Secretary of the Fascist Party, Roberto Farinacci, as well as Starace, Alfieri and Ciano who argued that it contradicted the Fascist regime's racial policy. The Council decided to defer Balbo's project.[50]

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Let us briefly survey the evolution of Italy's racial policy in the colonies. In an article published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* in late July 1935, the Duce declared that 'We Fascists acknowledge the existence of races, their differences and their hierarchy'. However, he stressed that

'we do not intend to make ourselves the preachers of segregation and of racial hatreds'. Mussolini pointed out that 'there are thousands of Negroes who fight as soldiers under the Italian flag and who have always fought magnificently for us and themselves', adding that 'This can be said too of the Arabs'.[51] After the proclamation of the empire the Fascist leadership became concerned with preserving Italian racial prestige and preventing the widespread phenomenon of *madamismo*. In January 1937 Lessona, who was undoubtedly interpreting the directives of the Duce, published an article in *La Stampa* titled 'The Italians in the Empire – racial policy'. One of the principles he invoked was 'full and absolute separation between the two races', another was 'collaboration without promiscuousness'. Lessona's (and Mussolini's) aim was to prevent intimate relations between Italian nationals and the indigenous population and above all to avoid the birth of mixed-race offspring. Subsequently, the regime began to introduce racial laws in Italian East Africa.[52]

On 5 August 1938, shortly before racial laws were first introduced to the Italian mainland, Mussolini published the *Informazione diplomatica* no. 18 in which he stated that the conquest of the empire had brought with it the urgent need to face the question of race. While other powers were able to rule their empires through a small number of officials, Italy by sheer necessity was destined to send millions to Libya and to Eastern Africa. According to Mussolini, the 'catastrophic' creation of a mixed 'bastard' race, which would foment disintegration and revolt, was to be prevented not through laws alone, but also by creating racial consciousness.[53] Subsequently, the late 1930s saw not only a series of discriminating laws and regulations, but also conferences, numerous newspaper articles and the appearance of a new magazine, *La Difesa dell Razza*, all of which dealt with racial separation. The dangers of miscegenation were even presented in the cinema, most notably in Guido Brignone's film *Sotto la croce del sud* (1938). By the time Italy entered the Second World War, the Fascist regime had established a form of *apartheid* in its East African colonies, as districts of major towns were reserved exclusively for whites and conjugal relations between Italians and Ethiopians were criminalized.[54]

While Mussolini's primary concern was Italian 'racial prestige' in Eastern Africa, he was also worried lest Italian superiority vis-à-vis the Arabs be questioned. A few years earlier, in January 1933, he had remarked that the French had committed a mistake by allowing sexual relations between natives and Europeans in Tunisia, the results of which were bound to be the emergence of a mixed race. He considered the policy pursued

by Badoglio – then the Governor-General of Tripolitania – as being too soft on racial matters.[55]

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Balbo's approach to the natives of 'his' colony, while paternalistic and not free of racism, still differed from that of Mussolini. As Governor he distinguished between the black, non-Arab people of the Fezzan in southern Libya, of whom he had a low opinion, and the inhabitants of the Libyan coast, whom he viewed as descendants of an ancient civilization. He believed that their intelligence and traditions would not allow them to remain permanently at a colonial level.[56] Indeed, Balbo was deeply concerned about the prospect of a nationalist revolt. Therefore, he exhibited respect towards religious customs and institutions, not wanting to break the traditional social order for fear of what would follow. He aimed at strengthening the traditional elements in Libyan society, collaborating with local notables and with established political and religious leaders of the Arab and Berber population.[57] A British journalist visiting Balbo's Libya noted that all the pro-Muslim steps taken by the government were 'calculated to petrify the Arab community in the past'.[58]

On the other hand, Balbo wanted to see the Libyan Arabs and Berbers fitted into the Fascist scheme of things. He went as far as telling Egyptian journalists that 'my biggest satisfaction derives from the fact that, since arriving in Libya as Governor General, I have meticulously followed with great zeal the development of a policy intended to elevate the Muslim population morally and socially, in accordance with the Duce's directives.'[59] As Claudio Segrè has pointed out, under Balbo 'Libyans could stay in any hotel and could travel first class on public transport whenever they could afford it.'[60] His attitude towards the Arabs and Berbers can be described as following a Roman Empire model of colonial rule (whereby provincial elites were incorporated into the imperial system and given Roman citizenship).[61] In a conference in Rome in October 1938, the Marshal tried to muster support for his proposal to grant Libyans full Italian citizenship by arguing that 'We have in Libya not dominators and dominated, but Catholic Italians and Muslim Italians'. However, as we have seen, Balbo's approach of encouraging limited native integration was defeated and Libya too was subjected to racial legislation. In October 1939 two Libyans were accused of having touched an Italian woman and were sentenced to eight years in prison for having violated Italian 'racial prestige'.[62]

Balbo was able to gain only a symbolic achievement with which he could attempt to counter-balance any local dissatisfaction with the waves of mass-colonization. On 30 November 1938 the Fascist Grand Council decided to grant certain Libyans the so called 'small' or 'special' citizenship. Muslim men who had served as soldiers in the Italian colonial army or those who had otherwise served the state were able to apply for the special citizenship. Valid only in Libya, it allowed Muslim 'citizens' to serve as *podestá* (appointed mayor) of Arab communities, but not of mixed ones. The Italian authorities received 2,500 requests for citizenship, mainly from government employees who assumed it was necessary for them to apply.[63] By May 1939 *Luce* newsreels could proudly show Balbo distributing the first citizenship certificates in Derna, Benghazi and Tripoli. The announcer stated that Balbo was fulfilling the promise made by the Duce – 'the Protector of Islam' – during his visit to Libya, adding that 'these Muslim citizens served side by side with Italians in East Africa'.[64] In a further attempt to present the special citizenship as beneficial to the Libyans, Balbo stated in an interview for the Egyptian *Al-Ahram* that Italy had found the best formula for allowing Muslims to become citizens of a European state without in the least losing their personal rights according to the canonical laws of Islam. He went on to say that Libya's *qadis*, imams and teachers at Islamic institutions were among the first to receive the special citizenship.[65]

Balbo also took steps to prevent criticism following the displacement in some places of natives from their traditional grazing lands by the new Italian colonists. He established native farming settlements in order to show that the Fascist regime cared for the well-being of the Arabs. A newsreel from May 1939 showed him handing Arab settlers keys to their new houses and inaugurating a water canal at Fiorita, 'the first Muslim agricultural village'. Later that month, when Balbo visited Cairo, he found that King Faruq expressed much interest in the development of the Libyan villages. Speaking to the Egyptian press, the Marshal promised that six new villages would soon be established. However, most of the agricultural settlements intended for the Arabs had not progressed beyond the blueprint stage when war broke out.[66]

Despite Balbo's efforts, Italian policy in Libya came under sharp criticism from across the Arab world. The press in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria reproved Italian colonialism.[67] Arab nationalists in Iraq published articles and held meetings denouncing the sending of thousands of Italian colonists to Libya as well as the decision of the Fascist Grand Council to integrate Libya into the Italian kingdom.[68] On 4 January 1939 Ciano mentioned in his diary the demonstrations

in Baghdad, protesting the mass-immigration of Italians to Libya. 'They think that this nucleus of Italians will break the Arabic preponderance in the Mediterranean', he wrote and added, 'They are right; this is our objective'.[69] In 1936 and 1937 the Fascist regime was able to present its policy in Libya as being beneficial to the Arabs and to Islam. By contrast, in 1938 and 1939, the colonizing and racist aspects of Italian rule came to light and, after January 1939, also its annexationist nature, as the coastal regions of Libya – now referred to as Italy's 'fourth shore' – were officially incorporated into the Italian metropole. While under Balbo Islam was respected, the natives of Libya were neither independent nor did they enjoy equal rights.

Antisemitic legislation – race as a factor in foreign policy?

Most contemporary historians agree that the decision to adopt an anti-Jewish policy was made by the Duce, without German pressure.[70] Michele Sarfatti describes Mussolini's move as an attempt to set 'the regime and the country' on a 'modern' or 'totalitarian' course. He asserts that this decision was made 'independently of continental developments', implying that it was motivated by internal-Italian considerations.[71] Meir Michaelis also believed that Mussolini's 'totalitarian aspiration' played a crucial part in the decision to adopt anti-Jewish laws. However, Michaelis also considered the tightening of relations between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany from 1936 onwards, and Mussolini's desire to remove potential discords that might interfere with this partnership, as important factors that influenced his decision.[72]

Since the 1980s a number of historians began considering the possibility that the adoption of anti-Jewish measures in the second half of 1938 was also influenced by the Fascist regime's support of the Arab nationalist movement against Zionism. Esmonde Robertson and Daniel Carpi mentioned the growth of pro-Arab tendencies in Italian foreign policy as one of the factors that contributed to the development of antisemitic legislation. However, neither could produce substantive proof to back this hypothesis.[73] In the final version of *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, De Felice cited a conversation that took place in 1938 between Vittorio Emanuele and Balbo in which the King listed his impressions of the reasons behind Mussolini's anti-Jewish approach. The last point on this list was that the Duce felt 'a bit jealous, I think, that German anti-Semitism had been so popular among the Arab nations of the eastern Mediterranean.'[74] However, if we accept De Felice's argument, which was examined in the previous chapter, that by the second half

of 1938 Mussolini had already forfeited the 'Arab card', then this would seemingly deprive the Duce of any reason to court the Arab nationalist movement by adopting anti-Jewish laws.

The available sources suggest that the ties with the Muslim world were not an important consideration behind the formulation of Mussolini's antisemitic policy. In early September 1938 the Duce personally wrote the draft of the 'Declaration on Race', which was to be approved by the Fascist Grand Council. The original handwritten text included the following statement: 'The Grand Council does not exclude the possibility of allowing the free and controlled immigration of European Jews into some areas (to be established) of Ethiopia, subject to agreements with leaders of worldwide Jewry.' Shortly before the Grand Council met on 6 October, an addition was made to this sentence, almost certainly by Ciano, specifying that Italy would be willing to allow Jews to settle in Ethiopia 'in order to steer away Jewish immigration from Palestine'. It seems that, as with the addition to the *Informazione Diplomatica* n. 14 a few months earlier, it was up to Ciano to consider at the last minute the ripple effects Italian policy might create in the Middle East.[75]

Before entering the Second World War the Italian regime did not make a concerted effort to utilize the anti-Jewish measures of 1938 as leverage to further relations with the Muslim world. In his contacts with the Arab countries, Ciano found it necessary to clarify Italy's antisemitic policy rather than to boast of it. On 10 August 1938 he instructed his diplomatic representatives across the Middle East to make clear to whomever they met that Italian antisemitism was intended exclusively for 'the Jewish element'.[76] Beyond the realms of officialdom there were some who took the distinction between Arabs and Jews one step further. On 26 August *Corriere della Sera* published an article by Salvatore Aponte titled 'Racism and the Muslim World'. The article claimed that scientific research had proven that Jews and Arabs did not share the same racial origin and emphasized that Islam had a long tradition of hatred towards the Jews.[77] However, such notions were not common in the general discourse of racial separation prevalent in the Italian press from the second half of 1938 onwards. Furthermore, as we have seen, racial legislation was applied against Muslims in Libya and even more rigorously against their co-religionists in East Africa.

In themselves anti-Jewish laws in Europe provided Arab nationalists in the Middle East with very few benefits. In fact, the antisemitic policy of Nazi Germany had only led to a massive increase in the number of Jewish immigrants to Palestine.[78] It is therefore not surprising that, when Ciano wished to elaborate on his country's favorable

policy towards the Arabs, he mentioned the *Informazione diplomatica* of February 1938 in which the Italian government officially stated its objection to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. He also mentioned the Fascist Grand Council meeting of 6 October 1938, which considered the possibility of allowing controlled Jewish emigration to certain zones of Ethiopia for the purpose of avoiding their immigration to Palestine. He made no mention of Italy's antisemitic legislation per se.[79]

After its implementation began Italy's antisemitic policy actually caused the Italian Foreign Ministry some minor problems in the Middle East. In the early months of 1939 the Italian Minister in Cairo, Serafino Mazzolini, found himself preoccupied with countering the boycott of Italian products and the anti-Italian demonstrations which were organized by the Jewish community in Egypt. He even resorted to filing a lawsuit against the editor of the Zionist weekly *Israël*, following a series of anti-Fascist articles.[80] The antisemitic laws also caused some discomfort for the Italian communities in Egypt. The departure of Jewish pupils brought about a drop in the enrolment to Italian schools in the country. Other local Italian institutions were likewise affected since Jews no longer contributed to welfare projects in the community. In addition, Italian antisemitic legislation was condemned by some of the Arab press in Egypt.[81] In Palestine, the Jewish press denounced Italy's antisemitic measures. The *Palestine Post*, for example, attributed the 'departure of Italy from the path of tolerance' to 'the pressure of Germany'.[82] The decision not to allow the enrolment of new Jewish cadets to the naval school in Civitavecchia deprived Italy of many of its supporters in the Revisionist Zionist movement. On the other hand Italian antisemitic legislation did not receive more than token support from the Arab press (the Jaffa daily *Filastin*, for example, justified the Italians for taking anti-Jewish measures).[83] To conclude, the adoption of discriminating laws against the Jews in Italy did not assist the Fascist regime in furthering its influence in the Middle East.

The conquest of Albania

Italian troops landed in Albania on 7 April 1939. A few days later, the Duce decided to erect a mosque in Rome 'in view of the fact that six million Italian subjects are now Moslems'. Ciano disapproved, noting in his diary that the Vatican was 'horrified at the idea' and besides, the Albanians 'are an atheistic people who would prefer a raise in salary to a mosque.'[84] It appears that the 'Islamic factor' was not taken into

consideration during the preparations for the invasion of Albania. The event did, however, create some negative repercussions in the Muslim-Arab world. Like his father before him, King Faruq of Egypt was generally sympathetic towards Italy. However, when Mazzolini came to see him on 8 May 1939 along with Marshal Balbo who had come to Egypt for an official visit, the King told them that the occupation of Albania displeased him because his family had originated from Albania and because the population there was predominantly Muslim. The Italian Minister responded that the Muslims of Albania were pleased with the change in government and would be happier still once they benefited from the fruits of Italian *civilità*.[85]

The conquest of Albania was also denounced by parts of the press in the Arab world. On 6 May 1939 the *Tunis Soir* published an article that ridiculed 'the protector of Islam' who conquered Muslim Albania and seized Arab lands in Libya. A week later the same paper published an article on 'the hatred of Islam for Fascism – the persecutor of Muslims'. French counter intelligence noticed an increase in tension between Arabs and Italians in Tunisia and numerous anti-Italian incidents were reported.[86] In Syria, Arab nationalists published declarations denouncing the European dictatorships. In Palestine the daily *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* attacked Italy for broadcasting messages of friendship to the Muslim world while 'swallowing' Arab and Muslim lands under the cover of friendship. The Egyptian weekly *Al-Ithnayn wal-Dunya* published a caricature showing Mussolini overpowering an innocent little girl, symbolizing Albania.[87] The Duce himself admitted to Hermann Göring that 'Since Italy's Albanian venture the Arabs were certainly rather doubtful as to his role of Protector, which he had assumed symbolically with the Sword of Islam.'[88]

However, the conquest of Albania, coming as it did on the heels of the *Anschluss* and the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia, did not spark a debate in the Arab press comparable to the one that preceded the conquest of Ethiopia. The Jaffa daily *Filastin* spoke of the transformation that had occurred in Arab thought regarding the dictatorships and the democracies in Europe during the previous years. This transformation was the result of the Arabs' disappointment with the policies of Britain and France. 'If it was not for the policy in Palestine, England and the democratic front would not have been confronted with the alarming transformation in Arab thought.' To bring home the argument, the paper cited the relative calm with which the Italian conquest of Albania was received, compared to the waves of protest the conquest of Ethiopia had caused.[89]

Last peaceful penetration attempts

Immediately after the Easter Accords of April 1938 were signed, Ciano felt it necessary to assure leaders in the Middle East that Italy had not abandoned its pro-Arab policy. He instructed Italian representatives across the Arab world to convey the message that, during the negotiations, Italy had safeguarded Arab interests and that owing to these efforts the agreement 'strengthened' the independence and the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia and Yemen.[90] Nevertheless, the Palazzo Chigi received discouraging news from its diplomatic outposts: the local press in Syria was critical of the agreement and a letter of protest had been sent from Egypt. Even in Palestine, Mazzolini admitted that the Arab press remained perplexed, that some responses were moderately critical of Italy and that there was a certain sense of disillusionment.[91] More importantly, Ibn Saud was suspicious of the Anglo-Italian agreement, seeing it as an attempt by the two powers to create a condominium over the Red Sea region. In September 1938 Fuad Hamza visited Rome and met with Gino Buti, the Foreign Ministry's Director General of European and Mediterranean affairs. The Saudi Undersecretary complained that just as Italy and Britain had signed an agreement safeguarding the independence of Saudi Arabia they could in the future, once circumstances changed, sign another agreement with the opposite intention. In early January 1939 the Saudi government informed both London and Rome that it did not consider itself bound by any agreement of which it was not a party.[92] Instead of strengthening Italy's position in the Arabian Peninsula, the Anglo-Italian Accord damaged Rome's efforts to befriend the Saudi ruler.

In practical terms, the approach adopted by the Saudi government brought about a major setback for Italian penetration attempts with Berlin making gains at Rome's expense. Despite the Italian gift of ten cannon in March 1938, the Saudis decided to purchase arms from Germany and the Italian army instructors who operated in the Saudi Kingdom were sent back to Italy in mid-June 1938. Events in the early months of 1939 provided further proof of Saudi mistrust toward Italy on the one hand and their preference for Nazi Germany on the other. In February 1939 the German Ambassador to Iraq, Fritz Grobba, came to Saudi Arabia to open the German legation in Jeddah. On this occasion King Ibn Saud told Grobba:

> Germany is the power whom one can approach quite frankly and whose friendship can be trusted, for her aims are generally

known. Germany makes no claims to Arab territory and mutual interests join her with the Arab world: *the Jewish question* [original italics].[93]

According to Grobba, the King offered his assistance in sending arms to Palestine should Germany desire it, mentioning his close contacts with Hajj Amin al-Husayni. As we have seen, Ibn Saud was reluctant to go through with a similar plan that allowed for the smuggling of arms supplied by Italy. He evidently perceived Germany, who professed to have no territorial ambitions in the region, to be more trustworthy.[94]

During the same period the Saudi government informed the Italians of its intention to close the Saudi Aviation School, which was run by Italian flight instructors, and to send their flight cadets to Egypt in order to avoid language difficulties. Gregory Alegi has observed that 'The Saudi decision was certainly influenced by political reasons'. After nearly three years of operation in the Saudi Kingdom the Italian aerial mission left the country on 1 April 1939.[95] Italy's position in the Saudi Kingdom was so shaken that the Italian Minister in Jeddah reportedly told German officials that cooperation between the Axis partners in Arabia 'would be extremely welcome to him'.[96] In June 1939 the Saudi King's confidant, Khalid al-Hud al-Qargani, was received by Hitler in Berlin. The Saudi emissary told the Germans that Ibn Saud wished 'to build up an armed force independent of Britain'. The Germans agreed to provide the Saudis with 8,000 rifles and 8 million rounds of ammunition. They also promised to build a small munitions factory in the Saudi Kingdom. Rome was consulted regarding these transactions and reluctantly agreed, urging the need to avoid Italo-German competition in the Arabian Peninsula. Eventually, the German-Saudi deal did not materialize and any plans for cooperation between the two countries had to be forsaken once war broke out.[97]

It was only as a last resort that Ibn Saud decided to purchase arms from Italy. On 31 August 1939 the Saudi Defence and Finance Minister, Abdullah Sulayman, signed a contract with Flavio De Feo, a representative of SANE, the society which had been formed in 1931 to promote Italian trade in the Red Sea. The contract stipulated the supply of over 9,000 rifles and muskets along with 12,000,000 cartridges, to be paid for in nine instalments amounting to £81,125 over a period of eight years.[98] The majority of these arms were shipped from Naples on 22 October 1939, on board the ship *Ircania* which was hired by SANE.

In 1942 Saudi Arabia suspended its relations with Italy and as a result the Italians did not receive all of the payments for the arms they had supplied.[99]

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The Imam Yahya requested cannon and rifles from Italy in late autumn 1937, shortly after the renewal of the Italo-Yemeni Treaty of Friendship. Negotiations proceeded through most of 1938 with the Yemenis haggling over the price. Ciano was willing to have the price reduced since the 'economic relations with Yemen are predominantly political in character'.[100] Moreover, Italian Military Intelligence reported that the British were putting pressure on the Imam to agree to the fortification of the eastern side of the Bab el Mandeb Strait. Yahya had thus far refused and Rome had an interest in preserving the Yemeni ruler's resolve. A contract for the sale of 5,500,000 lire worth of Italian arms was eventually signed on 24 August 1938. SANE, which took part in the negotiations preceding the deal, was instructed by Ciano to work out with the War Ministry the details of the delivery to Hodeidah. An artillery officer, Captain Giovanni D'Avossa (who reported to the Foreign Ministry before leaving), accompanied by two military instructors, arrived in Yemen with the consignment in mid-October and remained there until late January 1939.[101] In summer 1939 the Yemeni government was concerned with a renewed French interest in Sheikh Said, and decided to strengthen the defences of the peninsula.[102] It therefore requested an artillery battery which the Italians were happy to supply. In August major Francesco Del Duce headed a small Italian mission which oversaw the delivery of four 149/35 cannon to Sheikh Said. Later that month the Imam's son paid a visit to the peninsula and inspected the guns as they were being tested. Major Del Duce and his men remained in Yemen until January 1940.[103]

Ciano's ambitions to further Italian penetration in Yemen and to increase Yemeni dependency on Italian supplies were restricted by the unwillingness of Italian firms to act against their commercial instincts. In April 1938, for example, the Yemeni government inquired through SANE about the price of Fiat vehicles for transporting troops. However, in December of that year, Fiat answered that it would be unable to carry the deal through because the price it was offered was too low.[104] While Italian colonial officials and diplomats were able throughout the 1920s and 1930s to secure Yemeni friendship,

relations between the two countries brought very modest gains for the Fascist regime.

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In the period after the Easter Accords, the Italian Foreign Ministry seemed more hesitant than before to undertake clandestine activities in the Middle East. The strategy that had combined pro-Arab and anti-British propaganda together with covert assistance to Arab nationalists was abandoned and the Fascist regime showed signs of uncertainty about how this strategy ought to be replaced. Rome seems not to have made use of the opportunities it came across to stir up trouble in the Middle East either for reasons of lack of will, or because the ability was lacking, or both.

On 30 September 1938, at the height of the Czechoslovak Crisis, the Italian Minister in Saudi Arabia was approached by the Governor of Jeddah. The latter handed Sillitti a document representing, so he said, his own views. This document had an anti-British tone and argued that the Arabs should draw nearer to other European powers. The Governor wanted to know what Italy's position was. Sillitti suspected that the document originated from Ibn Saud's court and treated it as such (though, in retrospect, this seems unlikely, since it corresponds neither to Ibn Saud's policy at the time nor to his style of doing things).[105] Despite Sillitti's enthusiasm, Ciano's belated reply in December held no new promises for Italo-Arab cooperation. The Foreign Minister reiterated the principles of Italian policy towards the Arab countries: 'loyal and disinterested friendship'; preserving the independence of the independent Arab states; supporting the 'emancipation' of the countries under mandates or other forms of foreign control; and strengthening the friendly ties between Italy and the Arab world. In addition, Ciano referred Sillitti to the answer he had given him on 31 August 1937, when the Saudi government last inquired about Italy's long-term intentions in the Middle East.[106] As we have already seen, the Saudi leadership was dissatisfied with the answer Ciano had given in the summer of 1937.

Italian Foreign Ministry officials maintained contact with Musa Alami, the Mufti's confidant, as well as with Shakib Arslan in an attempt to convey the feeling that 'Italy had not abandoned the revolutionaries of Palestine'.[107] In March 1939 Alami offered to establish secret contacts between the Italian Foreign Ministry and the Syrian journalist, poet and nationalist leader, Fakhri al-Barudi, who opposed the French plan to hand the sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey. Barudi had travelled to Europe

and was prepared to meet Italian officials in order to discuss future collaboration. Casto Caruso, one of the Palazzo Chigi's experts on Arab affairs, pointed out that while Barudi would be able to cause trouble for the French in Syria, his political importance was not equivalent to that of the Mufti of Jerusalem in Palestine. He nonetheless recommended meeting the Syrian leader in order to hear his proposals.[108] The subject then surprisingly disappears from the record and it is not clear if secret contacts with Barudi were established. However, when we compare this incident with analogous cases, it is apparent that covert Italo-Syrian relations could not have progressed much without Mussolini's or at least Ciano's consent. The absence of any evidence to the contrary suggests that the Barudi *démarche* had little or no practical outcomes. Despite the anti-French rhetoric in Rome, the Fascist regime seems not to have made much of an effort to spark disturbances in the French mandates in the Middle East during 1938–39.[109] Nonetheless, Mussolini believed that he would be able to incite the Arabs and to use them as a weapon against both Britain and France should war break out.[110] As we shall see, this was a miscalculation on the Duce's part.

The Middle East chooses sides

In late 1938 and early 1939 the British and the French were able to take steps to reduce military and political threats to their respective positions in the Middle East in preparation for the possibility of war in Europe while the Italians, who had lost the initiative, seemed incapable of responding. In Palestine the British were finally able to quell the Arab Revolt by a combination of increased military force, encouragement of intra-Arab rivalries and appeasing politics (the White Paper of 1939 severely restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine). The French handed the Syrian coastal *sanjak* of Alexandretta to the Turks for the purpose of ensuring Turkish goodwill in any future European conflict, while the British also endeavoured to strengthen their relationship with the government in Ankara.[111] The Foreign Ministry in Rome believed that France's prestige in the entire Arab world had been diminished as a result of its policy in Alexandretta, but Italy's ability to capitalize on this was limited. Not wanting to antagonize either Arab public opinion or the Turks, Italy eventually adopted a policy of disinterest regarding the fate of Alexandretta, despite repeated appeals by Syrian Arabs and Armenians for Italian involvement and assistance.[112]

The once-dynamic Fascist propaganda apparatus was forced on the defensive. For instance, Radio Bari tried to remain silent about the mass

immigration to Libya until mounting criticism in the Arab World elicited from the station some feeble justifications for Italy's policy. Furthermore, the late 1930s saw more and more radio stations begin to broadcast programmes in Arabic, thus stripping Bari of the popularity it enjoyed a few years earlier.[113] Another obstacle for Italy's propagandists was the more bellicose approach of their French counterparts. In response to anti-French manifestations in Italy, Paris launched an anti-Italian propaganda campaign. In December 1938 the Arabic programmes of Radio Paris aired numerous items connected with protests in the Arab world against Italian policy in Libya. On 28 December, for example, a manifesto published by the 'Iraqi National Circle' was cited as calling upon Italy to 'suspend its anti-Arab policy [which runs] contrary to true Islam'.[114] This campaign was apparently not restricted to the airwaves. The Italian consulate in Aleppo reported an increase in anti-Italian propaganda, particularly regarding the policy in Libya. They suspected that this campaign was orchestrated by the French. Similarly, the Italian legation in Cairo believed that the articles published in the Egyptian weekly *al-Sabah*, criticizing Italian policy in Libya, were written by French agents.[115]

Furthermore, the French government took steps to refute Italian claims that it had forfeited the respect of its Muslim subjects. In January 1939 the French Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, visited Tunisia, where he met with local leaders and recalled the 45,000 Tunisians who had died defending France during the Great War. In February 1939 Algerian officials from the Paris mosque affirmed Muslim loyalty to France in a radio address which was recorded after a ceremony for fallen Muslim troops at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. On 29 March Daladier gave a speech in which he spoke of the attachment of the Muslim population to France, a gesture that was reportedly received with much emotion in North Africa.[116] Meanwhile the British were able to elicit declarations of support for the democracies from some of the Arab delegates who attended the Round Table Conference convened in London in February 1939 in order to solve the Arab-Jewish dispute in Palestine. These declarations were cited in the British press.[117] British broadcasters, like their French counterparts, lost their earlier inhibitions and began, in 1939, to criticize Italian colonial policy and to underline the negative impact that Italy's conduct in the Balkans would have on Rome's relations with the Muslim world.[118]

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As we have seen, the actions of the Fascist regime in the international arena in 1938 and 1939 did not help to increase Italian prestige in the

Middle East. Even in circles which were susceptible to foreign anti-British influence, Italy was eclipsed by Nazi Germany.[119] In Egypt Italy's sympathizers were restricted to the court and to extreme-rightists movements such as Young Egypt. The Leader of Young Egypt, Ahmad Husayn, visited Italy in July 1938 and was escorted throughout his visit by an official from the Ministry of Popular Culture. Despite making pro-Fascist statements, Husayn was not received by any high-ranking Italian leader.[120] The Palazzo Chigi clearly did not attach much importance to Husayn or to his movement. Italian diplomatic efforts rested, at this stage, on the good contacts between the Italian Minister in Cairo, Serafino Mazzolini, and the Egyptian court. Mazzolini had good relations with members of the Egyptian royal family as well as with some pro-monarchist officials. The late King Fuad had spent much of his youth in Italy. He studied in the military school of Turin and later served as an officer in the Italian army in Rome. His son, Faruq, maintained cordial contacts with the house of Savoy. The Italian architect at the Egyptian court, Ernesto Verrucci, often updated the Italian legation on developments in royal circles, seemingly with the King's permission.[121]

In October 1939 Mazzolini was approached by Aziz al-Misri, the Chief of the Egyptian General Staff. The anti-British al-Misri spoke of the need for closer collaboration between the peoples of the Mediterranean and said that Italy, owing to its location and strength, ought to be a key player in the region, together with Greece and Egypt. He stated that Egypt should adopt a racial policy and banish the 'coloured elements' to Sudan. Al-Misri stressed Egypt's need to be certain that Italy had no intention to conquer it. Only then could the Egyptians free themselves from the British who were hated, he said, by the army and by the people. The British were suspicious of al-Misri and in late 1939 they pressured the Egyptian government into removing him from his post as Chief of the General Staff.[122] Mazzolini also enjoyed cordial relations with the Prime Minister, Ali Mahir, who was determined to keep Egypt neutral in any European conflict. On 14 May 1940 Mahir expressed sympathy with Italy's claims in Tunisia and regarding Italian participation in the administration of the Suez Canal. He said that the British ought to leave the Mediterranean and that Egypt would not declare war against Italy if the Italians would refrain from attacking his country. After Italy joined the war, Lampson found Mahir's policy too unreliable and he therefore pressured the Egyptian King into replacing his Prime Minister.[123]

In the lower strata of Egyptian society Italy and Fascism were far from popular. For example, in March 1939 Mazzolini had to appeal to Ali Mahir in order to postpone an anti-Italian congress led by Al-Zahar

students and Libyan exiles.[124] During the same period the paper *al-Wafd al-Misri* published a series of articles, dealing with 'The Suffering of the Arabs in Tripolitania'. In June copies of a pamphlet titled 'Italy and Islam' were distributed in Egypt, calling on all Muslims to beware of Italy's desire to expand and to re-establish the Roman Empire. The conquest of Albania, the pamphlet said, was proof of Fascism's real policy towards Islam. It pointed out that Italy was colonizing Libya, thus obliterating the country's Arab character, and that in Ethiopia land was taken away from the native population and given to Italian settlers. In 1938 the writer Tawfiq al-Hakim began to criticize Fascism in his novels.[125]

Once war broke out in Europe in September 1939 most of the Arab countries chose to support Britain and France. Egypt and Iraq severed their diplomatic relations with Germany. Even the anti-British press in Palestine adopted a more conciliatory tone towards the mandatory power and published articles denouncing Nazi racial ideology.[126] Italy's decision not to enter the war was applauded throughout the Middle East. On 5 September King Faruq of Egypt wrote to Vittorio Emanuele to thank him for the attitude adopted by Italy regarding the war. Italian diplomats reported that in Iraq Mussolini's policy of non-belligerence was met with 'the liveliest satisfaction' and that Lebanese public opinion saw Italian non-intervention as benefiting Lebanon's security.[127]

Conclusions

While in diplomatic terms the Easter Accords were an Italian achievement insofar as they created the notion of parity between Britain and Italy, in terms of Middle Eastern politics they soon proved to be a liability. Italy's ability to present itself as a pro-Muslim power was severely restricted by its reaching an imperialist agreement with Britain, as well as by its appetite for expansion and by its colonization of a Muslim land. Furthermore, Mussolini could no longer hope to extract more concessions from Britain through fomenting disturbances in the Middle East. In theory Fascist subversive energy could have been channelled to unsettle France's position in the Arab world either as a prelude to an Italo-French agreement or as a means of increasing Italian penetration into the region. In practice, at least in the French mandates in Syria and Lebanon, this did not take place on any significant level. Rome had little time or energy for the formulation of its strategy in the Middle East – an area of marginal importance during 1939, an eventful year in Europe. Mussolini, it appears, believed that as a tool in peacetime politics Italy stood to gain nothing more

from supporting the struggle of the Arab nationalists. However, as the German summary of the conversation between Mussolini and Göring in April 1939 illustrates, the Arabs could still be of use to Italy once war broke out:

> The Duce expressed the view that, by anti-British propaganda among the Arabs, the Axis Powers could probably achieve a state of tension, but not a revolution. In the event of a war, however, the prospect of fomenting an Arab uprising would be more favourable.[128]

Italy, then, did not forfeit its 'Arab card' after the Easter Accords as De Felice suggested.[129] Mussolini simply tucked the card back into his packet, assuming he could re-use it once circumstances changed.

More broadly, by 1939, the Duce had become convinced that Italy would never be a true world power while it was trapped within the confines of *mare nostrum*. On 4 February 1939 he told the Fascist Grand Council that Italy must break the bars of its Mediterranean prison and march to the oceans. While some historians use this speech to emphasize Mussolini's commitment to a strategy of expansionism,[130] we should bear in mind that the goals it laid out were very broad and vague, leaving even the decision about which ocean Italy should march on unsettled. Despite his bellicosity, the Duce was hoping that war would not break out before 1942 or 1943, leaving Italy time to re-arm further, to completely pacify the *Impero*, to improve its financial position and to advance towards self-sufficiency.[131] However, time was not on his side. The intelligence he was receiving clearly indicated that a German-Polish confrontation was imminent and thus, in the late spring and early summer of 1939, Mussolini entertained thoughts of an 'immediate Axis occupation of Central Europe and the Balkans' as well as dividing French North Africa between Italy and Spain.[132] The Duce certainly wanted to use the turbulent international circumstances to bring about Italian expansion, but it seems he did not know himself exactly where or how this would be achieved. Although Fascist expansionist plans were still unformulated, in June 1940 breaking out of the Mediterranean prison became one of Italy's very few declared war aims.

6
The Optimistic Summer, June–October 1940

> Napoleon: 'My campaign will be one of surprise and attack […] I must have a victory that will ring through Europe.'
>
> (Mussolini & Forzano, *Campo di Maggio*, 1930)[1]

> I confer with the Duce. I find him in a good mood and very happy that Italy could score 'a success in Egypt which gives her the glory she has sought in vain for three centuries'.
>
> (Count Ciano, 30 September 1940)[2]

After nine months of 'non-belligerency' Italy joined the Second World War. On 10 June 1940 Mussolini told the crowds outside the Palazzo Venezia in Rome that Italy had to break the territorial and military chains that suffocated it inside the Mediterranean; that a nation of 45 million people would only be free if it had absolute liberty of access to the ocean.[3] The Middle East soon became one of the main theatres of operation in which Fascist Italy tried to realize the Duce's aspirations.

Renzo De Felice has argued that 'Arab policy' considerations became central to Mussolini's strategy only after Italy's intervention in the war.[4] Instead, it is suggested here that Italy's Middle Eastern ambitions during the summer of 1940 were not a radical alteration of former policy but rather its logical outcome in the new conditions created by the war. Mussolini's expansionist ambitions were no longer restricted by traditional peace-time foreign policy considerations. Colonial stability in Africa, which had been very influential in moulding Italian policy vis-à-vis the Arab world throughout the 1930s, was now far less important compared to the opportunity of enlarging Italy's possessions.

Once France and its colonial empire were out of the game, the only prizes Mussolini could still gain, which would ensure Italy's path to the oceans, had to come at the expense of either the British Empire, or the independent Arab states of the Middle East, or both.

This chapter outlines the Fascist regime's ambitions in the Middle East during the first months of its participation in the war and provides reasons for the failure of Italy's attempt to replace Britain as the hegemonic power in the region. First of all it examines Ciano's belated and unsuccessful attempts to secure territorial guarantees from the Germans. The second section analyses the detailed, hitherto unpublished, plans drafted by various ministries in Rome for the post-war Middle East. Then the chapter goes on to consider Italy's dealings with the Germans and with Arab nationalists regarding the future status of Middle Eastern countries. The final section examines Fascist Italy's failed Middle East campaign from June 1940 until the ill-fated Italian attack on Greece, which ultimately doomed Mussolini's independent war effort, in late October of that year.

Ciano's attempts to secure territorial guarantees from Hitler

In September 1939 military and economic weakness forced Mussolini to stay on the sidelines without joining the war alongside his German ally. By late February 1940 the Duce was confident the Allies would lose the war and repeated his thesis on gaining access to the open seas, 'without which Italy will never be an empire.' His interventionist desire was exacerbated in early March by the Allied blockade of German coal exports, on which Italy depended. Later that month Mussolini met with Hitler at the Brenner frontier. On 2 April the Duce told his Council of Ministers that he favoured going to war. He wanted Italy to 'move with the Germans [but] with our own war aims.' He spoke of a Mediterranean empire and of access to the oceans though he did not specify which territories he coveted.[5] Before entering the First World War Italy's territorial compensation was defined, however precariously, by the Treaty of London (1915). Despite some last minute attempts by Count Ciano, this precedent was not repeated when Italy joined the Second World War.

Once he became reconciled with the idea that Italy would soon become a belligerent, Mussolini's Foreign Minister began to focus his attention on securing territorial gains for his country. On 21 May 1940 he 'talked to the Duce of the need to clearly present our aspirations to the Germans. If we really must leap headlong into war, we must make a specific deal.'[6]

A few days later he spoke to Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of National Education, of his own aspirations for Italy: enlarging Albania at the expense of Yugoslavia, obtaining Corsica and a protectorate over Greece, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. He again stressed the importance of having a written agreement with Hitler regarding Italy's conditions for entering the war.[7]

At this stage the French ambassador approached Ciano with a last, desperate offer in order to keep the Italians out of the conflict, saying that 'we can make a deal about Tunisia and perhaps even about Algeria.' The Italian Foreign Minister answered that this offer was 'coming too late' and 'reminded him of the time when France, in 1938, objected to our having even those four reefs which England had ceded to us in the Red Sea.' Ciano treated this as no more than an 'academic' conversation, discussing un-realistic concessions.[8] At the same time he seems to have been hoping for a more vigorous French military resistance which might hold out for months, thereby increasing the value of Italian intervention. On 1 June he told the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires Leon Helphand (Helfand) that 'the French are magnificent soldiers' who 'have an incomparable record!'[9] However, events on the battlefields of France moved quickly and Mussolini could wait no longer. Italy joined the war on 10 June without obtaining a single promise of territorial compensation from the Germans.

Ciano believed that, like himself, Mussolini wanted to 'create enough claims to be entitled to his share of the spoils.'[10] However, once he entered the war, the Duce consistently argued that only territories captured by the Italian armed forces were certain to come under Italian rule. On 15 June he ordered Badoglio to prepare an attack on the French frontier. Mussolini told his Chief of General Staff that 'If we limit our intervention merely to helping the collapse of France we shall have no right to our share of the booty.' He was hoping to capture Nice, Corsica, and Tunisia.[11] A few days later, still hoping to spur his generals into action, the Duce told his Chiefs of Staff that 'it would be a grave blow to our prestige to receive territory from the hands of our ally, without having occupied it.'[12]

Despite Mussolini's hopes, the collapse of France took place a week after Italy had joined the war and unfolded without any significant Italian contribution. On 18 June 1940 Mussolini came to Munich to present to Hitler his armistice terms with France. Ciano, who accompanied the Duce, drafted Italy's demands together with a few Foreign Ministry officials and high-ranking officers on the train, demands which Mussolini approved during a stop at the Brenner. Among other things, the Italians requested the occupation of Tunisia as well as French naval bases in Algeria and Morocco, the transfer to Italy of ships and aircraft in the

occupied areas and the 'Neutralization of Beirut'. In a separate meeting that took place at the same time Ciano tried to take Italy's case one step further. He told his German counterpart Joachim von Ribbentrop that from Britain Italy would demand Malta, the dismantling of British bases in the Mediterranean and the replacement of Britain in its mutual treaty with Egypt as well as in the condominium over Sudan. However, Hitler curbed the Italians' enthusiasm, arguing that over-ambitious requests at this stage were counter-productive and might result in the French navy joining the British. Mussolini acquiesced and significantly reduced Italy's terms.[13] The Duce's son-in-law noted in his diary that 'once again that unattainable dream of his life: glory on the field of battle is fading away.'[14] The Franco-Italian armistice was signed on 24 June.

By 26 June Ciano had put together a tentative list of territories that Italy would demand at the end of the war. Taking into account both Spanish interests and Germany's desire to placate the French, the Italian Foreign Minister abandoned the demands advanced in Munich to Morocco. However, the claim for Tunisia, parts of Algeria, Corsica and Djibouti remained. As for the British Empire, Rome's newly defined aspirations included direct Italian control over Malta, British Somaliland, the island of Perim in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean. Aden could possibly be handed over to Yemen and Cyprus to Greece (in exchange for the region of Chameria near the Albanian border and the Island of Corfu). According to Ciano's scheme, the mandated territories in the Middle East – Syria, Lebanon and Palestine – were to become independent states that would sign treaties of mutual assistance with Italy. Egypt too was to sign a treaty with Rome, while the Suez Canal Company was to be abolished and replaced by a new international commission. The fate of Iraq was left undecided.[15]

Ciano then travelled to Berlin and met with Hitler on 7 July 1940. He told the Fuehrer that the Italians were preparing an attack in North Africa and gave him a long list of Italian territorial demands. Michele Lanza, a member of staff at the Italian embassy in Berlin, was handed what he aptly named Italy's 'bill' (*conto*) on a crumpled tissue paper to translate before the meeting. He recorded that Nice, Corsica and Malta were to be annexed by Italy; Tunisia plus half of Algeria were to come under an Italian protectorate; Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan were to become independent states with exclusive treaties of alliance with Italy, and with the Italians occupying some strategic positions in these countries; Perim and Socotra were to be occupied along with Aden (no mention was made of the idea to hand the latter over to Yemen); in Egypt and the Sudan Italy was to take over Britain's legal, political

and military position; the Suez Canal Company was to be liquidated and a special regime set up in its place; and finally British Somaliland, Djibouti and Equatorial Africa as far as Chad were to be ceded to Italy. Hitler's translator, Paul Schmidt, recalled that during the meeting Ciano 'behaved as though the war was already won. He almost fell over himself in making demands on behalf of his country.'[16]

When reporting to his father-in-law, Ciano wrote that 'I made mention of our European, African and Asian claims (*rivendicazioni*). Hitler said that *a priori* he agrees with us over the Mediterranean and Red Sea settlement.'[17] A few weeks later Ciano privately bragged that Hitler 'approved' Italy's requests.[18] This, however, is not supported by other sources. The official German record of the meeting simply states that the Fuehrer repeated what he had said in the past, that the Mediterranean and Adriatic 'belonged to the historic sphere of interest of the Italian peninsula, and Germany fully recognizes this.'[19] Schmidt, who was present, recalled that 'Hitler paid no attention' to Ciano's requests 'but simply uttered a long victory monologue'. Ribbentrop reportedly told Ciano that 'One must be moderate and not have eyes bigger than one's stomach.' Yet, as Giordano Bruno Guerri notes, Ciano may have been asking for a lot in order to get at least some.[20]

At this stage Ciano appears to have been certain that victory was near. He advised Giuseppe Bastianini, the former Italian Minister to London, to perfect his German, adding that he believed that a German landing in Britain was imminent. The Foreign Minister said that the war would be over in two months and that Italy needed to shed some blood ahead of the negotiations with its allies which could last three years.[21] The planning for the post-war reorganization of various countries in the Middle East and Africa discussed below was probably prepared in anticipation for these negotiations.

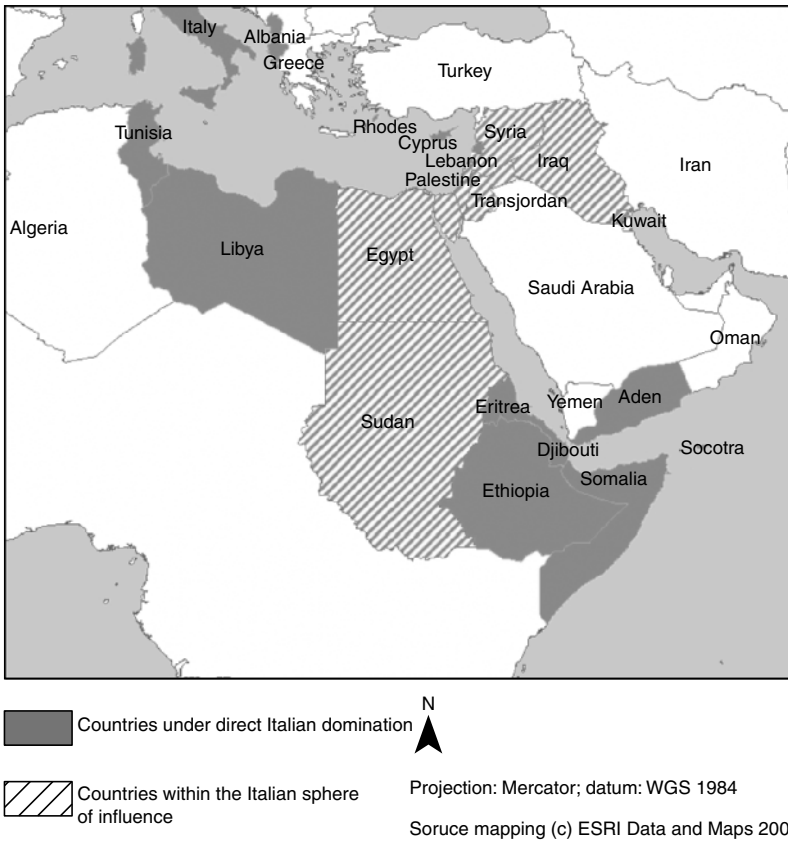
Preparing for victory: Plans for a post-war Middle East

From late July until mid-September 1940 several members of staff at the Italian Foreign Ministry, at the Ministry for Italian Africa and at the Royal Army's *Ufficio Operazioni* were hard at work, preparing plans for the post-war reorganization of Africa and the Middle East. Officials from the first two worked in conjunction while the army's planners operated separately without acknowledging the plans drawn up by their civilian counterparts. Meanwhile schemes for Italian expansion in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, which at times bore a striking resemblance to the secret plans drawn up by state officials and army

officers, began to appear in the Fascist press.[22] The prevailing assumption seems to have been that the war would soon be won. Thus the planners did not concern themselves with the military objectives that ought to be obtained in order to secure victory, but focused instead on geopolitical plans for the post-war period. The vague ambitions of previous years were translated into specific claims. If these plans had been implemented Italy would have had a huge African empire and a vast zone of influence in the Middle East. In light of the meagre performance of the Italian armed forces during the war, these ambitions – and the optimism that underlined them – seem ludicrous.

On 29 July 1940 the former Italian Minister in Cairo, Serafino Mazzolini, met with Gino Buti, the Director General of European and Mediterranean affairs at the Italian Foreign Ministry, and with his deputy, Giovanni Guarnaschelli. Mazzolini was entrusted with the task of preparing a 'monograph' on what should become of Egypt after the Axis powers won the war. Corrado Baldoni, the former First Secretary at the Italian consulate in Cairo, was to assist him with this project. Mazzolini found out that other active and veteran diplomats were busy drawing up separate plans and that the Ministry for Italian Africa was examining economic matters related to Egypt. He disliked this division of labour. 'A tower of Babel will come out of this' he noted in his diary.[23] There also appears to have been a difference in approach between the officials of the two ministries. The Ministry for Italian Africa wanted Sudan to come under Rome's direct control, seeing it as an indispensable link between Italian North and East Africa. The plan which they prepared argued that the Egyptians would accept the loss of their nominal control over Sudan in return for full independence for Egypt itself as well as some territorial compensation. At the Foreign Ministry on the other hand Buti adhered to Ciano's line and was prepared to settle for an Italo-Egyptian condominium over Sudan[24] (see Map 6.1 and Map 6.2).

The Ministry for Italian Africa wanted Italy to demand the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt in return for liberating the country from British domination. Control over Sinai (possibly with the addition of the port of Aqaba) would enable the Italians to 'exercise decisive influence' over Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula as well as to intervene militarily in case problems arose in Suez. The main dilemma in the eyes of the authors of this plan was what to do with the Canal itself. Two contingencies were examined: leaving the Canal and its defence to the Egyptians; and taking possession of the Canal or at least of its eastern bank. The Ministry for Italian Africa argued that the second option should be adopted. Italy had entered the war to secure its path to the oceans.



Map 6.1 The post-war Middle East according to the plans of the Italian Foreign Ministry (1940)

Should Spain capture Gibraltar it would control both sides of the western gate to the Mediterranean. Accordingly, if Spain somehow ceased to be a friendly country, Italy would need to control the Suez Canal in order to access the Indian Ocean. The authors believed that Italy would be able to take control of the Canal without permanently damaging relations with Egypt.[25]

Regardless of the differences of opinion, optimism seems to have been the order of the day. On 20 August Mazzolini learnt that Italian forces had conquered British Somaliland. 'When will Egypt's turn come?' he asked himself impatiently. A day later, after meeting with Buti and

Map 6.2 The post-war Middle East according to the plans of the Ministry for Italian Africa (1940)

Guarnaschelli, he noted in his diary that, written plans aside, Italy needed to start making practical preparations at once, so that 'victory will not find us unprepared.'[26] Buti shared Mazzolini's optimism. On 10 September he told the industrial magnate Alberto Pirelli that the collapse of Britain was inevitable.[27]

A similar spirit seems to have guided the planners at the army's *Ufficio Operazioni*. While the inclusion of Egypt in the Italian Empire might at first seem logical – the military planners argued – once the question was examined thoroughly it became apparent that Egyptian independence ought to be maintained. The main reasons for this were that Egypt already had its own political institutions and possessed a strong 'spirit

of independence'; and that it was an important Muslim country which served as the cultural centre of the entire Arab world. An attempt to annex Egypt, they believed, would not only be resisted by most of its population, but would also cause negative repercussions for Italy across the Middle East as well as inside Italy's colonies. However, direct domination was not necessary. In fact, Egypt would have no choice but to collaborate with the Fascist Empire, since the army's plan foresaw much of Africa and parts of the Middle East coming under Italian control. The shared responsibility for the condominium over Sudan would, it was hoped, also help bring Egypt closer to Italy. Like their counterparts at the Ministry for Italian Africa, the military planners also envisaged Italy assuming control over the Sinai Peninsula as well as responsibility for the defence of the Canal Zone.[28]

In addition to the secret plans prepared by the army and the different ministries, the post-war future of Egypt was also discussed in Italian publications such as Bottai's journal, *Geopolitica*. Paolo D'Agostino Orsini, a staunch supporter of Italian expansionism in Africa, believed that Italy would replace Britain in the Sudan and the Red Sea. He argued that this new reality would leave plenty of room for Italo-Egyptian collaboration. After all, Italian purchase of Egyptian and Sudanese cotton had helped the economies of these countries. From now on, he concluded, the Egyptian economy ought to tie itself to Italy rather than Britain. The Italians could then assist Egypt in becoming a fully independent, European-style country.[29]

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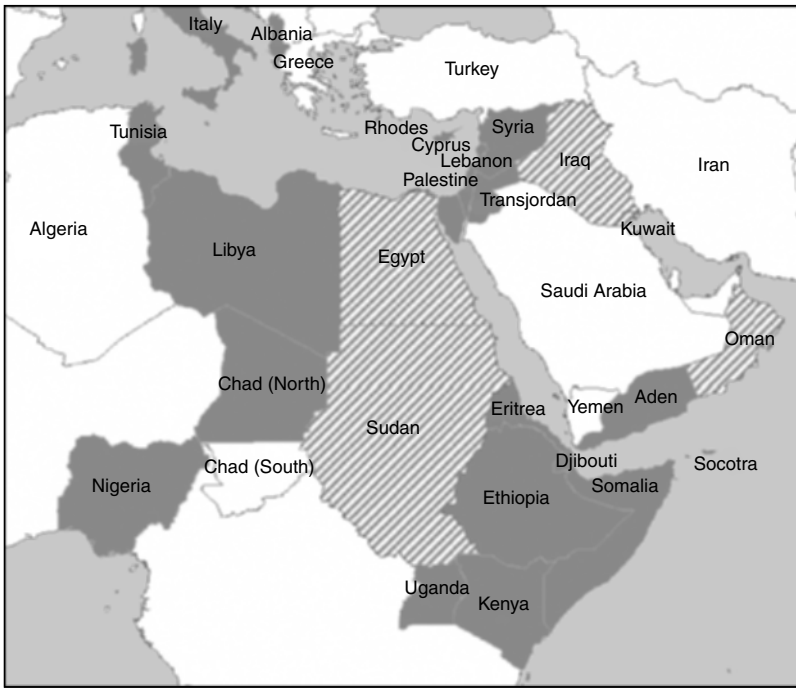
One of the most ambitious plans to emerge in Rome during the optimistic summer of 1940 was the one drawn up by the army for the division of the entire African continent into German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese spheres (leaving South Africa and Egypt independent). The plan envisaged a total removal of Belgium and a near total removal of Britain from Africa as well as a severe reduction of French possessions in the continent. The planners thought that, following the reorganization of colonial borders, a small African territory should be set aside as an outlet for the Jews of Europe. According to this scheme the Italians were to gain – in addition to Sudan – the entire East African Horn, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, the northern half of Chad and, of course, Tunisia. These territories would give the Italian empire uninterrupted land-linked access to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans as well as satisfying Italy's needs in terms of economic resources.[30]



Map 6.3 The post-war Middle East according to the plans of the Italian army's *Ufficio Operazioni* (1940)

In what seems like a preparation for the bargaining that would take place at the peace talks, the planners put forward some legal and moral justifications to support their position. The claim for French and British territories in East Africa was nothing more than a belated implementation of the colonial compensation Italy had been promised in Article 13 of the Treaty of London (1915). The claim for northern Chad was based on a note submitted in 1890 by the Sublime Porte to London and Paris, claiming that Ottoman suzerainty in Libya extended south, all the way to Lake Chad. As for Tunisia, the planners argued that before

the disingenuous French takeover of 1881, the country's economy had been dominated by Italian colonists who had laboured to transform it from a desert to a blossoming garden.

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The Foreign Ministry's expert on the Holy Land was Count Quinto Mazzolini, Serafino's brother, who was forced by the war to leave Jerusalem and now headed the office in exile of the Consul General for Palestine and Transjordan. In August his office prepared an extensive three-volume plan on the history, the present situation and the future prospects of these two countries.[31] The gist of the plan was as follows: Transjordan and Palestine were to be united into a federated state for which the recommended form of government would be a monarchy. While the identity of the king would, of course, be decided by 'superior questions of general politics', Mazzolini went into great detail to remind his readers that Vittorio Emanuele also bore the title of King of Cyprus, Jerusalem and Armenia.[32] Mazzolini, in slight variance to the guidelines given by Ciano in late June, offered two possible scenarios: direct Italian dominion with a 'personal union' or an independent state 'with Italian influence like the type England has had in Egypt and Iraq.' If decision makers preferred not to give the crown of Palestine and Transjordan to the King of Italy then a candidate from among the Arab princes would have to be chosen. Mazzolini named Talal, son of the Amir Abdullah, as a possible choice. Alternatively, a provisional triumvirate could establish a constituent assembly which would choose the head of state. For the triumvirate Mazzolini nominated Hajj Amin al-Husayni and Awni Abd al-Hadi (with whom the Italians had had dealings in the past) as well as a Christian lawyer, Francis Khayat.

Hence, Mazzolini saw both Muslim and Christian Arabs as being potential allies of Italy. With regard to the Jews, he made a clear distinction between the Sephardim, to whom he was sympathetic and the Ashkenazim of Central Europe who, he believed, had 'provoked' the Germans into passing antisemitic laws. The Sephardic Jews would be easily incorporated into the new state, as their attitude was pro-Italian.[33] The 'undesirable' elements of the Jewish population (illegal immigrants, the unemployed and those without families in Palestine) would be encouraged to emigrate. Those leaving the country would make room for Arabs, mainly of Christian descent, who had emigrated in previous decades to North and South America, and who would be encouraged to return. Jewish immigration to Palestine would be stopped, the Jewish Agency dismantled and their education system would have to be re-oriented (that is de-Zionized).

He believed that such measures would mollify the Palestinian Arabs. Mazzolini's plan included a draft for a treaty between Italy and 'The Kingdom of Palestine and Transjordan' as well as a list of Italian officials who would participate in the administration of the country.

Some of Mazzolini's proposals regarding Palestine and Transjordan were incorporated into a more general plan prepared by the Italian Foreign Ministry on 6 September 1940 for the future re-arrangement of the Arab countries. According to this plan, Syria was to become independent, preferably with a republican regime, which would grant complete autonomy to the southern region of Jabal Druze as well as limited autonomy to the north-western Alawite region. Syrian independence would be subordinate to a military alliance with Italy, Italian occupation of naval bases and airfields, preferential treatment in economic concessions, Italian protection of Christian minorities and the granting of a special status to the Italian language in local schools. Lebanon would receive only a limited, mandate-style independence. While the Lebanese would be allowed to have their own legislative organs, an Italian High Commissioner and a number of administrative advisers would in fact run the country. Furthermore, a strong permanent occupation force of some 10–15 thousand metropolitan troops would have to be stationed there to protect the Lebanese from the Syrians on one hand, and to keep the surrounding Muslim countries in check on the other.[34]

As in the case of Egypt, the army prepared its own plan for this part of the Middle East. Oddly enough, the military planners chose to start by stressing that the premise for their plan was the centuries-old 'spiritual bonds' that tied Palestine with the Italian Peninsula. These ancient relations started at the time of the Roman Empire and continued throughout the history of the Papacy and of the Italian maritime republics. Only after this introduction, were economic interests and access to Mesopotamian oil also mentioned. The army's planners envisaged a 'Swiss-type' federated state comprising Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan and parts of Sinai with Jerusalem as its capital. Each autonomous canton was to be as ethnically homogenous as possible (one for the Jews on the Palestinian coast, another for the Christians further north and a third for the Muslims in the interior of the country). This new 'State of the Levant' was to be placed under an Italian mandate (see Map 6.3).[35]

The fate of Palestine after the victory of the Axis was also a matter of public debate during the summer of 1940. In June two Italian archbishops and 47 bishops petitioned Mussolini to take the Hole Sepulchre

in Jerusalem out of Britain's hands and entrust it to the Royal House of Savoy.[36] In late August *La Tribuna* published an article by the veteran diplomat Romolo Tritonj who stated that after the war Italy intended to establish a protectorate over Palestine. He went on to say that Palestine, like Albania, would be united with Italy under the crown of the House of Savoy.[37] His ideas bear a suspicious resemblance to some of the suggestions included in the plan for Palestine drafted by Quinto Mazzolini. The orientalist Ettore Anchieri proposed a different solution. He believed that the war opened an opportunity to re-arrange the Middle East and to do away with the Balfour Declaration, which he saw as a tumour in the body of the Palestine Mandate. The grave problem of the Jewish diaspora should not be solved at the expense of the Arabs. He believed Palestine should become an independent Arab state, where Jews would have to learn to live peacefully. The country should not be flooded by Jewish immigrants who bring the spirit of the ghetto with them. The Arab state would have to offer guarantees to the Christians regarding the holy places. Clinging to the pre-war discourse that had already vanished from the plans of the government and the military, he argued that Italy had never sought territorial conquest in the Middle East but only natural and pacific expansion while collaborating with the Arabs. He therefore believed that Arab and Italian interests converged as the affirmation of Arab independence was the best guarantee for equilibrium in the eastern Mediterranean.[38]

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The war against Britain brought the fate of Cyprus to the attention of the Palazzo Chigi. The ministry gathered various reports on the island's history and its commercial ties with Italy. One of these reports, prepared by the *Banco di Roma*, pointed out that during the past two millennia Cyprus had been under Italian control for almost 600 years (400 under Rome and a further 200 under Genoa and Venice).[39] The Foreign Ministry's third office for European and Mediterranean affairs drafted its own plan on 15 October 1940. The authors emphasized the significance of the Mediterranean for Italy and the importance of Cyprus for Italian expansion in the Middle East. Having pointed out that Italy was fighting this war to 'liberate the world from British domination of the seas' and that Cyprus must not remain in British hands, the planners presented three possibilities for the island's future: direct Italian domination; autonomy within the Italian Empire; and ceding Cyprus to Greece in return for other islands of greater economic and military

interest. The unrealistic nature of this plan is illustrated by the fact that the exchange of territory with Greece was being considered less than two weeks before Italian troops invaded that country. The authors felt that the first option – direct domination – had its merits. Should the Arab countries of the Middle East be allowed to form an independent state under Italian influence, Cyprus could serve as the backbone of Italy's military control over the region. However, should Italy exercise direct control over one of the Arab countries in the Middle East, the possession of Cyprus would lose much of its significance. Furthermore, the Greek majority on the island might be hostile towards direct Italian domination. The planners went on to rule out Cypriot autonomy since they did not trust the Greeks' tendency towards for 'political intrigue and underground manoeuvres'. The Greek government might also reject the exchange of Cyprus (which had been under foreign domination for centuries) for independent Greek territories such as Corfu or Crete. In short, the final decision between the three options was dependent on Greece's position in the new European order. The planners, however, made clear their preference for direct domination, pointing to the claim of the House of Savoy to the Cypriot throne.[40]

On this occasion the Foreign Ministry planners were in perfect agreement with their counterparts at the army's *Ufficio Operazioni*. The latter also called for direct Italian control over the island, backing their claim by referring to the strategic importance of Cyprus for securing imperial communications and for asserting Italy's domination over the coast of the Levant. They too pointed out that the Italian royal family had historic rights over the island.[41] The military difficulties involved in obtaining and maintaining Italian control over Cyprus received no mention.

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In late June Ciano gave no clear indication of which regime Italy wanted to see in Iraq. He seems to have been unsure about Germany's position regarding this oil rich country, which was not on the shores of the Mediterranean or the Red Sea and thus did not technically fall under Italy's sphere of influence as Hitler had defined it. In early September the Italian Foreign Ministry apparatus recommended that Iraq remain independent and that it sign a mutual defence pact with Italy, the terms of which should be more lenient than the current Anglo-Iraqi treaty.[42] The planners at the Italian army's *Ufficio Operazioni* perceived Iraq as a weak country, suffering from ethnic disunity and powerful neighbours who coveted its oil. They were also concerned about the possibility of

Russian expansion into this region. Surprisingly, the military planners concluded that a strong independent Iraq would best serve Italy's interests. They recommended the extension of Iraq's borders at the expense of Iranian, Kuwaiti, Syrian and Turkish territories, and that Italy should be prepared to help defend Iraq from any foreign threat. In return for its support, Italy should be awarded the concessions currently enjoyed by the Iraq Petroleum Company and other British-backed firms.[43]

The Foreign Ministry's position regarding the Arabian Peninsula was consistent with Ciano's directives. Aden had to come under direct Italian control to safeguard Italy's access to the Indian Ocean, while no clear indications were given as to what should happen with Saudi Arabia or Yemen.[44] The Ministry for Italian Africa prepared its own plan for the Arabian Peninsula, although it is not known whether any copies of this plan survived.[45] The most detailed plan on hand was compiled by the army's *Ufficio Operazioni*. This plan envisaged direct Italian control over Aden (including the Sheikh Said peninsula, then part of Yemen) and the islands of Perim, Socotra and Bahrain (the latter was known to have extensive oil reserves). Oman was to become a semi-independent state under an Italian protectorate, while Yemen and Saudi Arabia were to remain independent. With the Italians holding Aden, which had a strategically located deep-water port, Perim and Djibouti, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait at the southern gate of the Red Sea would be under complete Italian control. Furthermore, Italian presence in this region would serve as a bulwark against any future 'Slavo-Asiatic' expansion towards the Persian Gulf or East Africa.[46] The planners were also concerned about Saudi expansionist ambitions. This last threat would require the maintenance of Italian forces in the southern parts of the aforementioned 'State of the Levant' as well as the construction of Italian bases in the area around Aden and on the Sheikh Said peninsula.[47] The army's plans for the post-war Middle East, like those of the Ministry for Italian Africa, were often more ambitious than the ones drawn up by Ciano and the officials of the Foreign Ministry.

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The inter-ministerial staff work that outlined Italy's interests and aspirations for the post-war period was probably carried out at the Duce's behest. The outcome was the culmination of nearly sixty years of colonial frustration, dating back to the French seizure of Tunisia in 1881, which now came to the fore.[48] Despite the grandiose ambitions

described above, a very sombre Mussolini addressed his Council of Ministers on 10 August and told them that:

> It is very important, note, to get in your heads – at the peace table it will proceed by percentage: [those] who will capture more will have more. One has what one has conquered. The occupation of territories will reduce to a minimum the inevitable concessions that the enemies and even the friends can request.[49]

The ambitious Duce knew that before his diplomats could negotiate Italy's share in the spoils of victory, the country's armed forces must first of all play their part.

The Italian-German-Arab triangle

After 10 June 1940 the triangle, which had long defined and limited Fascist Italy's policy in the Middle East, was broken: traditional relations with Britain and France were no longer relevant and the importance attached to the policy in the colonies was reduced. Fascist expansionist desires – the third side of the triangle – were set loose. However, in order for their ambitions in the Middle East to be fulfilled in the new conditions created by the war the Italians now needed to have Germany's backing and to placate Arab-nationalist demands for independence. Thus a new triangle of differing, and at times conflicting, interests was created.

As we have already seen, in 1938–39 the Duce was confident that once war broke out he would be able to raise 'the Arabs' against Britain and France. However, once hostilities in the Middle East began the Italians only made a feeble attempt to enlist Arab support or, at least, to ensure their neutrality. On 29 June 1940 Radio Bari's Arabic programme told its listeners that 'Italian action on the Cyrenaican border is directed exclusively against the English. The Egyptian people know well that Italy does not have anything against them, but that [Italy] wants to be a significant factor in the liberation of Egypt and of the entire Arab world from British domination'. On 17 July Radio Bari told the Egyptians that 'Italy is fighting only against the British forces which occupy Egyptian territory illegally'. The broadcast promised that 'Italy intends to respect Egypt's independence and sovereignty, its institutions and freedom'. Furthermore, it promised that should Italian troops be forced to enter Egypt they would not remain there longer than it was 'strictly necessary'. The precedent set during the Spanish Civil War, where Italian forces did

not remain in the country after their mission had been accomplished, was mobilized to prove Italy's altruistic intentions to the Egyptians. Bari then went on to describe how detrimental the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 had been for the Egyptian economy and how the British were stripping the Egyptian army of its arms.[50] On 7 July the Italian Ministry for Popular Culture sent 600,000 leaflets in Arabic and Italian to Tobruk in order for them to be dropped over Egypt. Their message was similar to the one transmitted by Italian radio: they reminded the Egyptians of how brutal British occupation had been; they promised that Italy intended to liberate Egypt and the whole Mediterranean from British domination; and they assured the Egyptians that once Italy had won, Egypt would gain its liberty. One of the leaflets ended with the words 'Long live independent Egypt!'[51]

However, Arab suspicion regarding Italy's intentions in the Middle East was hard to allay. In late June the anti-British Prime Minister of Iraq, Rashid Ali al-Kaylani, asked the Italian Minister in Baghdad, Luigi Gabbrielli, if Italy would help to secure Syria's independence following the fall of France. Ciano replied on 28 June, assuring the Iraqis that in accordance with the policy that was pursued until now, 'Italy aims to secure the complete independence [and] territorial integrity' of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the other countries under British mandate. He also stated that Italy would oppose any British or Turkish attempt to occupy territories in Syria, Lebanon or Iraq.[52] However, this assurance and similar statements broadcast on Radio Bari did not satisfy Iraq's nationalist leaders. Rashid Ali wanted an official public commitment from the Axis. Accordingly, Naji Shawqat, the Iraqi Minister of Justice, extended a feeler towards Germany. During an official visit to Turkey he told Franz von Papen, the German ambassador in Ankara, that:

> As the Arab national movement had fought against Anglo-French imperialism, so it would have to oppose Italian imperialism. It was therefore in the interest of the Axis Powers for Germany to use her influence with Italy, in order to support a solution that would be compatible with the interests of the Arab movement.

The Iraqis asked for an independent Arab government to be set up in Damascus. This in turn would provide the Mufti of Jerusalem with a base from which he could resume the struggle in Palestine. 'The prerequisite, however', noted Papen, 'was that we relieve their anxiety over a possible Italian imperialism.'[53]

There were voices within the German Foreign Ministry that called for a more active involvement in Arab affairs even at the expense of the Italian allies. The former German ambassador in Baghdad, Fritz Grobba, had long been advocating the strengthening of Arab-German ties. In the summer of 1940 Papen began to stress the urgency of defining the Reich's interests in the Middle East, 'so that the hopes of the Arab world are not dashed even before the war has taken a decisive turn on this continent'.[54] However, Ernest Woermann, the Director of the Political Department at the German Foreign Ministry, concluded that 'we must give Italy absolute precedence in organizing the Arab area'. Even though 'All views about the Arabian area received here indicate a unanimous anti-Italian attitude among the Arabs', Woermann believed that 'We ought not to allow ourselves to become involved in this Arabian game and ought not to arouse their hope that they could get from us support against Italy.' Ribbentrop concurred: 'As long as we are still in the war, we should tell the Arabs only what we are fighting against, namely England, and only speak of "liberation of the Arab world", without detailed reference to any goals for the future.' Consequently, on 20 August Berlin instructed its embassies abroad that 'Germany pursues no political interests in the Mediterranean area […] This consequently rules out any German claim to political leadership, or the sharing of leadership with Italy in the Arab territories'.[55]

Not surprisingly, Arab demands for guarantees from the Axis persisted. The exiled Mufti of Jerusalem, who had fled from Beirut to Baghdad shortly after the outbreak of war, took the negotiations with the Germans and the Italians upon himself. In mid-August he sent one of his close associates to meet with the Italian Minister in Baghdad. At this meeting Gabbrielli was told that the Arabs in Palestine intended to fight against the British until they obtained their independence. To achieve their goal the Palestinian Arabs requested arms and money from Italy. Like Rashid Ali, the Mufti also wanted the Axis powers to give a common declaration promising the Arabs full independence.[56] Husayni proceeded to dispatch his private secretary, Uthman Kamal Haddad, on a mission to Berlin and Rome. Once in Europe, the latter claimed to be speaking on behalf of an inter-Arab committee under the Mufti's chairmanship which included representatives from Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. As we have seen, the Mufti had made similar claims during the late 1930s which turned out to be unfounded.

Haddad suggested to his German hosts that the Axis governments issue a joint declaration recognizing: the full independence of all the Arab countries (including Aden and the Persian Gulf states); 'the right

of all Arab countries to shape their national unity in accordance with their wishes'; and the Arabs' right 'to solve the question of the Jewish element in Palestine and the other Arab countries'. Haddad also suggested that the Axis deny having any imperialistic designs upon Egypt and Sudan. In return the committee promised that the Iraqi government would grant Italy and Germany a preferential commercial and political position. Furthermore, it would initiate a general uprising in Palestine and Transjordan (which would have to be supplied with arms that were handed over by the French to the Italian armistice commission in Syria and Lebanon).[57]

These demands did not sit well with Italy's designs for the Middle East. According to the plan drafted by Quinto Mazzolini for Palestine and Transjordan, the idea of establishing a union encompassing seventy million Arabs 'should be skilfully opposed'.[58] Guarnaschelli, who was entrusted with studying the Mufti's proposals, held a similar view; a public declaration recognizing the unlimited independence of the Arab countries did not correspond to Italy's interests. Instead Rome should make sure that only some of the Arab countries receive limited independence, resembling that given to Iraq under its treaty with Britain. 'Free passage to the Indian Ocean would never be secured if the Suez Canal Zone, Sinai, the Sudan and Aden are not controlled by us' and therefore Italy should resist Arab demands regarding these regions. Furthermore, a united and fully independent Arab state might fall under the influence of another power. Guarnaschelli preferred to divide and control; to deal with smaller states tied to Italy by mutual treaties of alliance. Therefore, instead of acquiescing to the Mufti and Rashid Ali's request for an Italian public declaration of support for full Arab independence, he recommended broadcasting a more general statement, without significantly deviating from announcements given in the past.[59]

In September the German ambassador in Rome discussed the Mufti's proposal with Ciano. When asked about Italy's views on the chances of success of an Arab revolt in Palestine, the Italian Foreign Minister replied that the return on Italy's past subsidies 'had not been exactly great'. Nonetheless, the Italians told the Germans that they intended to grant the Mufti's request for financial assistance, though not in the amount he desired (£20,000). They hoped that these funds would help the Mufti resume assassinations, disruptions of lines of communication, and attacks on the oil pipeline. Ciano passed the Mufti's request for arms to Badoglio and his deputy, General Ugo Cavallero, though it is not clear what happened to the request after this point.[60]

The representatives of the Mufti and of Rashid Ali maintained their pressure on the Germans. Haddad remained in Berlin and Naji Shawqat paid another visit to Papen in Turkey. The German Foreign Ministry wanted to prevent the Iraqi nationalists from seeking (and obtaining) better terms from the British. In mid-October Berlin induced Rome to agree to broadcast a joint declaration on Arab affairs. The statement, aired on 23 October, spoke of 'sentiments of friendship for the Arabs' and of a 'wish that they may prosper and be happy and assume a place among the people of the earth'. The Axis powers had 'watched with interest the struggle of the Arab countries to achieve their independence.' The Arabs could count on Italy and Germany for 'full sympathy also in the future.'[61] This vague declaration avoided naming specific Arab countries and made no mention of an Arab union. The Fascist leadership was hoping that Italy would achieve victory in the Mediterranean theatre without external support and seemed to believe that it lay not far ahead. They were unsure about the military effectiveness of Arab assistance and, in any case, did not want to pay the diplomatic price demanded by the nationalist leadership in Baghdad. Mussolini gambled on the British surrendering in the face of German pressure and on a parallel Italian victory in Egypt. Alas, the unfolding events of the war would soon reveal Italy's military weakness.

The failed Middle-Eastern campaign

When Italy joined the war Balbo in Libya wanted to capture Sollum, which lay across the Egyptian frontier, but Badoglio vetoed offensive actions and thus handed the initiative to the British. Consequently, on the night of 13 June 1940 British troops took Fort Maddalena from the Italians and later that month attacked Fort Capuzzo.[62] With the disappearance of the threat of a French attack from Tunisia following the surrender of France, Balbo was again pushing for offensive action against Egypt. This time the Chief of the Italian General Staff was in a similar frame of mind. On 28 June 1940 he instructed Balbo to transfer the fifth army corps from the Tunisian frontier to Cyrenaica and to be ready to attack by the morning of 15 July.[63] He promised to send a reinforcement of motor vehicles for this purpose. However, on the same day, Balbo's aircraft was accidentally shot down by the Italian naval anti-aircraft defences of Tobruk. This caused a substantial delay in what Mussolini envisaged as his 'parallel war' effort.

Initially, Balbo's replacement in Libya – Army Chief of Staff Graziani – was instructed to launch the offensive by 15 July 'in order to be in

synchronization with the German action' against Britain. However, Graziani's reluctance to advance and the German setbacks in carrying out Operation Sealion (their plan to invade Britain) delayed the attack on Egypt for a further two months. The Italians had 167,000 men, 339 L. 39 light tanks, seventy M. 11/39 tanks, some 9,000 motor vehicles and 327 aircraft in Libya. Although Grazian's forces were often ill-equipped and suffered from various logistical difficulties, the British were numerically inferior. In fact, the latter were somewhat surprised that 'Italian attitude and dispositions remain mainly defensive in spite of great superiority of numbers and withdrawal of practically all our armoured troops.' As Knox has pointed out, 'Graziani's greatest deficiency was not equipment but ingenuity and will.'[64]

Before Graziani's assault on Egypt got under way in mid-September, the Italian air force had an opportunity to attack Britain's strategic positions in the Middle East as well as British shipping in the eastern Mediterranean. During July and August Italian aircraft taking off from the Dodecanese Islands raided the port and the oil refineries of Haifa four times. They managed to hit a few oil storage facilities and to kill dozens of Arab and Jewish civilians. After the first raid Radio Bari proudly told its Arab listeners that now 'the heroic Arabs of Palestine could for the first time have proof of the strength of their great friend Italy which has started to show the British that their undoing also in Palestine will not be late in coming.'[65] Italian aircraft also attacked Alexandria nine times during July and August, causing little damage to the port and a limited number of casualties. The first raid on the Suez Canal area took place on 28 August. S 81 aircraft flew from the Dodecanese to Ismailia in search of British ships, but as they were unable to locate any they proceeded to bomb Port Said, causing little damage.[66] Planes from Italian East Africa raided the port of Aden on a number of occasions. These attacks resulted in a few civilian casualties but caused only limited damage to military facilities. If this was an Italian attempt to cripple the British war effort in the Middle East it should have been pursued with more vigour. As the official British history for this theatre of the war concluded, 'The enemy's air attacks on British bases had so far been singularly ineffective.'[67]

In the mid-1930s the Italian military envisaged a converging attack on Sudan and Egypt from Cyrenaica in the east, and from Eritrea in the south. By the late 1930s such plans had been abandoned since Italy's position in East Africa was not stable enough to support a large-scale assault on the British. At the beginning of June 1940 Mussolini and Badoglio ordered the Governor of Italian East Africa, Amedeo Duke of Aosta, to remain on the defensive. After the collapse of France, Aosta

persuaded Rome to allow him to make a move on Sudanese border posts. On 4 July some 8,000 Italian troops advanced from Eritrea into Sudan and took Kassala. In early August the Governor of Italian East Africa proposed further limited operations in the Sudan. This prompted Badoglio in mid-August to make a rare attempt to coordinate Italian strategy in Africa. He instructed Aosta to prepare an offensive in Sudan to coincide with Graziani's attack on Egypt. However, Italian resources in East Africa, which were already limited when the war broke out, were further depleted by the costly seizure of British Somaliland. By late August, with no German landing in Britain in sight, Badoglio abandoned the grandiose vision of supplementing the Cyrenaican offensive with a push from the south towards Egypt.[68]

Another course of action, which the Fascist regime did not pursue to a considerable extent beyond the anti-British propaganda mentioned above, was the subversion of Middle Eastern societies against Britain. Ciano tried to encourage the Imam of Yemen to use the current situation to settle his scores with the British in Aden. The Italians also wanted to induce Ibn Saud to 'resolve old differences' with Britain. Neither attempt was successful. At the same time in Italian East Africa the Duke of Aosta complained that he was being kept in the dark by the Foreign Ministry in matters relating to the Arabian Peninsula. He informed Rome that the office of SIM in Somalia believed that, if it were provided with the right means, it could use Yemen as a launching pad for operations in the Hadramawt. Aosta admitted that he was not in a position to comment on the feasibility of such operations, but said he would examine the matter once Rome gave its consent. The Foreign Ministry saw no reason to object, so long as the agents of SIM worked in harmony with the official Italian representatives in the Arabian Peninsula. It advised that contact should be made with anti-British tribes in the Aden Protectorate and on the Island of Socotra.[69] The topic then disappears from the record probably without ever materializing. It is not clear why military authorities in Italian East Africa did not plan and train for such an eventuality in the months that preceded the war. Graziani's forces in Libya were likewise unprepared to carry out subversive activity in Egypt. Serafino Mazzolini, the would-be Italian High Commissioner for occupied Egypt, only arrived at the Cyrenaican front in early October, almost a month after the offensive had begun. His staff, which included men of considerable Middle Eastern experience such as Ugo Dadone (the former director of the AEO), was restricted to gathering information from Egyptian and other radio broadcasts.[70] The Italians did not try very hard to agitate, fund and foster an uprising against the British in Egypt.

Mussolini was clearly intent on defeating the British through Italian military might alone, without relying on the assistance of anti-British Egyptians who might present him with the bill once victory was attained. He also turned down German suggestions for military assistance. The *Wehrmacht* began to consider operations in the Mediterranean theatre in late June. In July and August the Fuehrer wavered between a direct assault on the British Isles and a peripheral strategy that would include action in the Mediterranean (with the attack on the Soviet Union looming in the background).[71] By the end of July the heads of the German army were considering the possibility of weakening Britain's overseas position through attacks on Gibraltar, Haifa, and Suez, and actively supporting the Italians in Egypt. General Franz Halder, Chief of the German Army's General Staff, noted in his diary that 'The offensive in Egypt will accomplish no decisive results if executed by the Italians alone. Handicapped by their economic straits and their ineffectualness, the Italians are in no position to achieve anything on a decisive scale.'[72] Admiral Erich Raeder, Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, was also trying to persuade Hitler to adopt a strategy directed at destroying Britain's strength in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In September Raeder pushed for a German seizure of Gibraltar (with Spanish assistance) and the Suez Canal, followed by a move on Palestine and Syria.[73] However, for the time being, Hitler opted not to pursue a Mediterranean strategy and restricted himself to supporting Mussolini's effort to defeat the British. In July 1940 the Germans offered to send long-range bombers to Rhodes and in September they suggested dispatching two armoured divisions to Libya. Mussolini and the heads of his armed forces turned these offers down for reasons of prestige.[74]

The Nazi leader ended up regretting his initial support for Italian ambitions in North Africa and the Middle East. In his 1945 testament, Hitler stated that 'Had we been on our own, we could have emancipated the Moslem countries'. The Italians were 'bitterly hated' throughout the Arab world and Mussolini's 'ridiculous pretensions' to be regarded as the 'Sword of Islam' evoked a 'sneering chuckle'. In short, 'We had a great chance of pursuing a splendid policy with regard to Islam. But we missed the bus, as we missed it on several other occasions, thanks to our loyalty to the Italian alliance!'[75]

Perhaps if Italy had defeated the British in Egypt in 1940 the Fuehrer's opinion would have been different. In late August 1940, after Ciano reported from Vienna that Operation Sealion had been delayed, Mussolini decided to carry out the North African offensive without waiting for a German landing in the British Isles. He justified this by arguing that,

should the Nazi leadership reach an agreement with Britain, Italy would remain outside the discussions, since it had not fought a single large-scale battle.[76] On 13 September, after numerous proddings from Rome, Graziani finally advanced across the Egyptian frontier and captured Sidi el-Barrani. He then halted for further logistical preparations. Italian radio broadcasts used the occasion to address the potentially vulnerable topic of Italo-Muslim colonial relations, proudly announcing:

> The Libyan native units were superb in every way. In only eight days they covered on foot one hundred and fifty miles of desert, fighting and taking very calmly the enemy air bombardments, thus disproving the British propaganda which stated that the natives of Libya would not fight for the mother country.[77]

Throughout September the Italian air raid campaign in the Middle East was intensified. Badoglio instructed Cesare Maria De Vecchi di Val Cismon, the Governor of the Dodecanese, to focus the attacks of his aerial units on Alexandria as the primary target.[78] In addition, Haifa was bombed four times and Tel Aviv once, the latter attack leaving more than a hundred civilians dead. During the raid on Tel Aviv and one of the raids on Haifa, Italian aircraft scattered leaflets in Arabic. These boasted of the recent conquest of British Somaliland and claimed that Italy enjoyed mastery over the skies of Gibraltar and Malta and that Italian troops were advancing on Egypt and Kenya. They went on to say that the petrol stores 'stolen from the Arabs' by the British have been destroyed and that the British in Palestine would soon be defeated. 'You will recover ownership and freedom of your land with Italian assistance', they promised. However, the leaflet's message was undermined by the number of Arab casualties and by the damage Italian bombs had caused to a mosque and a Muslim graveyard in Haifa.[79] In October the Italians carried their effort to cripple Britain's ability to draw on Middle Eastern oil reserves one step further. Taking off from Rhodes, four Italian aircraft flew some 2,500 kilometres to carry out a spectacular though ineffectual air raid on the Island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. They then proceeded to fly a further 1,600 kilometres in order to land in Italian East Africa.[80] This raid marked the end of Mussolini's independent war effort in the region.

Less then five months after joining the war Italy's window of opportunity to single-handedly defeat Britain in the Middle East was about to close. The optimistic summer of 1940 came to an end. Soon the gloom of fall and winter set in, bringing with it Italy's catastrophic

campaign against Greece, the British attack on the Italian harbour of Taranto in November and finally O'Connor's counteroffensive in North Africa in December that pushed the Italians out of Cyrenaica. Italian propaganda tried to boost morale by highlighting the heroism of Graziani's troops who 'had held out to the very last', and praising 'the fervent fighting spirit and the valiant courage displayed by the Libyan divisions who rendered honour to the tradition of [the] Italian army'. However, a completely different picture emerges from the captured war diary of Second Lieutenant Federico Gorio of the second Libyan division: 'Panic and general escape. We stop the Libyans and the lorries with revolvers in our hand.'[81]

The German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck once remarked that 'Italy has a large appetite, but poor teeth'.[82] In December 1940 Hitler expressed a similar view, observing that failure had the 'healthy effect of once more compressing Italian claims to within the natural boundaries of Italian capabilities'.[83] He dispatched Erwin Rommel and the *Afrika Korps* to North Africa to salvage Libya. Though the Fascist Regime would continue to take part in and to influence the policy of the Axis in the Middle East, Mussolini's 'parallel war' was finished. The Duce now found himself playing the ignominious part of Hitler's junior partner. In spring 1941 the *Impero* in East Africa fell. Worse was to follow for Italy and the Fascist regime.

Conclusions

For many years Fascist leaders had been conjuring the idea of a Mediterranean empire. Nonetheless, Italy entered the Second World War without clearly defining which territories it coveted. Ciano made haphazard attempts to list Italy's aspirations shortly before and shortly after joining the war, but the matter was not seriously examined until late July – early August, when the different ministries sat down to articulate Rome's position.

It is safe to assume that the various planners wanted their work to please their superiors and that the plans they drew up for the post-war re-arrangement of the Middle East and Africa were designed to do precisely that. Nonetheless, the intensity with which the planners grappled with historic justifications for their claims suggests that quite a number of government officials, army officers and specialist scholars seem to have absorbed the Nationalist/Mussolinian rhetoric about Italy's need to break its Mediterranean barriers and march towards the oceans. Further examples of this trend can be found in the debates

surrounding the extension of Italy's empire in the contemporaneous press. While not quite 'working towards the Duce' parts of the Italian elite certainly shared some of Mussolini's expansionist ambitions. Furthermore, the variety of solutions that the different planners presented illustrates that there was room in the plans for personal opinion. For example, Count Quinto Mazzolini – a monarchist as well as a Fascist – advanced the idea of bringing Palestine and Transjordan under the crown of the House of Savoy.

Despite the Duce's desire for military victories it is clear that these ambitious plans could only have been obtained at the post-war peace talks. It is also clear that at least some of the persons who were in charge of drafting these plans believed that the war would be a short one. Mussolini, as Brian Sullivan has remarked, gambled that his armed forces would be strong enough – if just barely – to take advantage of the unique opportunity offered by the collapse of France and Britain's isolation.[84] However, by the end of 1940 the disparity between Italy's ambitions and military capabilities was visible to all.

The war also revealed the falsity behind the Fascist regime's pro-Muslim policy and its incompatibility with Italian expansionist desires. A truly pro-Muslim Italy would have issued an official declaration promising full Arab independence before the attack on Egypt in September 1940, and would have worked hard on fomenting and supporting armed insurrections against the British in Palestine, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East. But Mussolini was still confident and did not want to hand out pledges he had no intention of keeping. De Felice has argued that after 10 June 1940 'Mussolini's Arab policy changed its nature, lost the instrumentality that characterized it until now and assumed a central place in the Duce's political-military strategy'.[85] However, Mussolini's wartime attitude towards 'the Arabs' was, in fact, no less instrumental than it had been during the second half of the 1930s. Through Radio Bari's Arabic programme and leaflets dropped over Egypt and Palestine, the Italians promised the Arabs in the Middle East independence, a promise that contradicted the Fascist regime's actual plans for the region. Throughout the optimistic summer of 1940 the Italian leadership did not plan to hand the Middle East over to the Arabs; it wanted to assign them a subordinate role under, and in some cases alongside, the new Italian Empire. It was only much later in the war – when Mussolini and Ciano found themselves in a much weaker position than in June 1940 – that they conceded to the Mufti and to Rashid Ali that Italy would support the establishment of a pan-Arab state, despite all the elaborate plans which advised to the contrary.[86]

Conclusions

Throughout most of the interwar period the Italian government sought to increase its influence in the Middle East. Fascist policy in the region was influenced by ideological expansionist desires, but at the same time it was an evolving policy that adapted to the changing circumstances. Mussolini, who stood at the centre of policymaking, was a man of contingencies. He tried to utilize the opportunities he identified to attain a number of general (though at times not fully thought out) ambitions. During his many years in power the Duce raised and lowered a few banners of what he saw as national interests (such as Italy's rights in Ethiopia and Tunisia, or breaking out of the Mediterranean 'prison'), according to the state of international relations and to his 'feel for the game'.[1]

In the Middle East Fascist hegemonic ambitions were tempered by a lack of financial means, by foreign policy constraints, which depended on the European balance of power, and by colonial considerations. Italy's financial inability to efficiently penetrate the Middle East was constant. Foreign policy goals varied, though they consistently aimed to change the post-First World War Middle Eastern peace settlement in a way that would enhance Rome's influence in the region. Mussolini's revisionist policy generally tended to take on one European power at a time. It was anti-French from the late 1920s until 1935; then anti-British from the summer of 1935 until April 1938; resumed an anti-French position in November 1938; and became both anti-British and anti-French in the spring of 1940. At various stages Mussolini might have envisaged the acquisition of Middle Eastern territory through war and conquest but these were certainly not the only vehicles by means of which he intended to extend Italy's influence in this region.

Before the Second World War Italy's policy was essentially one of pacific penetration. It consisted of strengthening Italy's ties with Middle

Eastern leaders, attempting to tap into Middle Eastern markets (especially by meeting demands for arms), and presenting Fascist Italy in a favorable light through the use of various propaganda techniques. De Felice has correctly described Italy's dealings with Arab nationalists (particularly in Palestine) as being 'instrumental'. However, these leaders were not seen only as cards in Mussolini's power struggle with Britain, but also as (subordinate) allies in times of war and potential collaborators in the new order that the Italian leadership envisaged for the Middle East in the summer of 1940.

Colonial policy considerations also changed with time. Throughout most of the 1920s and early 1930s pacification in Libya was the primary concern. This had an adverse effect on Italy's image in the Middle East. Once the Sanusi uprising was quelled, the Fascist regime adopted a conciliatory policy of respect towards the Islamic religion which served as a tool for both colonial and foreign policy purposes. The construction and re-construction of mosques in Libya and East Africa, the encouragement of Islamic educational institutions in Italy's colonies, the assistance the regime offered to pilgrims from Italian domains wishing to perform the *Haj* and the favorable treatment afforded to the Muslims of Ethiopia were all harnessed to strengthen Italy's colonial position and to improve its image in the Middle East. In late 1938 colonial priorities changed again, when the Fascist regime sent thousands of colonists to Libya, thus creating a set-back for Italy's attempts to court the Arab world.

Throughout this book we have seen how Italian policy was confined within a triangle of different and at times conflicting forces. To a certain extent these forces represented institutional and ministerial interests. Naturally, colonial considerations were high on the agenda of the governors in Tripoli, Asmara and Addis Ababa and for officials at the Ministry for Italian Africa. Diplomats at the Foreign Ministry were more likely to underline the importance of traditional balance of power considerations. Ardent Fascists in the press and elsewhere often wanted policy to follow ideological lines. However, this distinction must not be overstated. The entire Italian leadership sought to increase the country's greatness. At the same time, all were aware of the constraints – both foreign and colonial – within which Italian policy had to operate. Thus, when devising their policy, Mussolini, Ciano, Lessona, Balbo and other decision makers vacillated between the three approaches.

Italy's actions, declarations and propaganda were met with a varied reception in the Middle East. While Fascism had a certain appeal in some young nationalist *effendiyya* circles, Italy's brutal policy in Cyrenaica in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and especially the execution of the Sanusi

leader Umar al-Mukhtar, provoked widespread condemnation. Italian conduct during the Ethiopian Crisis was also harshly criticized throughout the Middle East, although Mussolini's perceived defiance of Britain paved the way for cooperation between the Fascist regime and some of the region's anti-British leaders. Between 1936 and 1938 the rivalry with Britain, together with the pro-Muslim image that Fascist propaganda fostered, reduced the level of Arab antagonism towards Italy. However, this relative success was short lived. From late 1938 until the outbreak of the Second World War, Italy's colonialist and expansionist policies, particularly the mass immigration to Libya and the conquest of Albania, alienated public opinion makers in the Middle East. Thus, when Italy joined the war the Italians had very few allies in the region.

The sources examined in this study shed new light on relations between nationalist leaders in the Middle East and the Fascist regime. Italian historians have only partially illuminated this nexus while Anglophone historians of the twentieth century Middle East tend to overlook Italian sources. In extreme cases this has led not only to inaccuracies in the description of Italian ambitions and actions in the region, but also to a misrepresentation of the position of some of the Arab leaders. Ibn Saud, the Imam Yahya and the Egyptian leadership were players in a multi-sided game. Their policies were influenced by the looming threat of Italian expansion, but they also used it to further their own interests, especially in their dealings with Britain. In this context the secret contacts between the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, and the Italians were an exception. Italian sources, even when taken with a grain of salt, expose a leader who had placed himself firmly in the Fascist camp already in the 1930s. His actions certainly did not represent 'the Arabs' as a whole, yet they cannot be ignored. Indeed, some of the findings presented here suggest that certain aspects of the historiography dealing with this Palestinian leader are in need of revision.[2]

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The Second World War put Fascist Italy's Middle Eastern policy to the test. On 13 September 1940 Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, the Commander-in-Chief of Italian forces in Libya, launched an attack against British positions in Egypt. The Fascist leadership was hoping that the war would enable Italy to replace Britain as the hegemonic power in the Middle East. Expansionist ambitions were set loose. It was only within the context of the first year of the Second World War, when a major re-shuffling of

territorial possessions seemed to be just around the corner, that Knox's 'Italian *spazio vitale* in the Mediterranean and Middle East' and Salerno's empire 'stretching from East Africa and the Middle East, up the Red Sea, through the Suez Canal and into the Balkans' could be realized.[3] It was only then that the Fascist leadership sat down to try to define what type of domination it wanted and where.

Why did Mussolini's bid for Middle Eastern hegemony fail? After the Second World War, General Halder observed that 'In the diplomatic, propaganda and military fields, Germany had neglected to prepare the ground for a serious threat to Britain in the area of that country's important land communication route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. [...] No uniformly thought out plan was developed for the exploitation of the Arab nationalist movements.'[4] Fascist Italy had more of an interest than Nazi Germany in preparing for such an undertaking. Indeed, between 1935 and 1938 Italy's diplomatic stance and propaganda were geared towards raising anti-British sentiment in the Arab Middle East. Furthermore, in Europe Italy had acquired a powerful ally as Mussolini and Ciano secured Hitler's pledge to treat the Mediterranean as an Italian sphere of interest. Yet Italian policy changed following the Easter Accords of April 1938 and Rome toned down its anti-British campaign in the Middle East. One could argue, along the De Felicean line, that the Fascist leadership had achieved all it wanted in this region and that the encouragement of Arab nationalism had served its purpose. However, the Duce did not give up on the idea of making more gains in the Middle East. He continued to express his intention to use 'the Arabs' against Britain and France once war broke out and, as we have seen, after Italy abandoned non-belligerency, the regime set out elaborate and ambitious plans for an Italian-dominated Middle East. Halder's observation is therefore applicable also to Italy. In terms of diplomacy, propaganda and military planning Mussolini and his followers neglected to prepare the ground for a serious threat to Britain's Middle Eastern position.

The immediate explanation for this failure is that the attention of the Italian government had shifted its focus away from the Middle East during the crucial two years before entering the Second World War. To this, one should add several deeper reasons. First of all, the geography of Italy's colonial possessions enabled the Fascist regime to threaten the British militarily, especially in Egypt and the Sudan, but made any attempt to overrun their position in the entire Middle East very difficult. Secondly, the goal of replacing Britain as the hegemonic power in the region was over-ambitious considering Italy's military and

economic weakness. The war brought to light the poor state of Italy's armed forces, which were in no position to defeat the British despite considerably expanded government spending during the second half of the 1930s.[5] Their condition and subsequent performance were the result of poor military leadership coupled with the disparity between Mussolini's political ambitions and Italy's actual military capabilities and insufficient economic resources (coal, oil and steal, among other things, were in short supply). Much has been written about the logistical difficulties and shortcomings that plagued the Italian armed forces in 1939–40.[6] To these we should add the frequent alterations in foreign policy goals in the years before the war. The Italian Chiefs of Staff had to adapt their planning to the rivalry with Yugoslavia and France in the late 1920s and early 1930s, then to the preparations for the seizure of Ethiopia, followed by planning for war against Britain and France in the Mediterranean (at a time when their means were already severely overstretched by subduing resistance in Ethiopia and by participation in the Spanish Civil War). In North Africa Pariani had envisaged an attack from Cyrenaica on Egypt in order to reach the Suez Canal, but this plan was shelved in 1939 as military attention shifted towards Italy's northern borders and the Balkans. Finally, from autumn 1939 until the collapse of France in late June 1940 Badoglio insisted on a strict defensive strategy in both North and East Africa. This state of affairs undermined the possibility for consistent planning and preparation.

A further reason for the Duce's failure was that the regime's ambitions in the Middle East did not generate sufficient enthusiasm at home. Throughout the 1930s the Fascist leadership sent out mixed messages regarding its goals in the region and subsequently did little to prepare the Italian people for a war of conquest there. François-Poncet, the French Ambassador in Rome, observed that 'Yesterday, it was Tunisia that they spoke of mainly. Today it is to Albania that attention has turned. The simple Italian people do not even try to understand.'[7] When Mussolini decided to join the Second World War, he failed to galvanize his people behind him. The decision to enter the conflict did not enjoy popular support within Italian society and the war aim of breaking out of the Mediterranean prison was vague and distant. Not only did it make the Duce suspicious in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Middle East, but it also prevented any possibility of presenting a clear and coherent list of national interests and priorities in order to mobilize support at home. As Clausewitz remarked, 'No war is commenced, or, at least, no war should be commenced, if people act wisely, without first seeking a reply to the question, what is to be attained'.[8] While the plans

drawn up by the various ministries in the summer of 1940 illustrate that Mussolini enjoyed the backing of at least a part of Italy's elite, many 'ordinary' Italians viewed the path taken by their government with perplexity, indifference or criticism.[9]

The Duce's search for Middle Eastern hegemony had taken a long and complicated route that entailed much trial and error. Claudio Segrè has pointed out that 'Like Napoleon, Mussolini wanted to appear both as a conquering imperialist and as a champion of the oppressed nationalities.'[10] Neither was possible without enthusiasm at home, a powerful cohort of supporters in the Middle East, a much stronger military and a more self-reliant economy. Eventually, the contradicting aims underlying Italy's policy proved both unattainable and irreconcilable. Neither the means available to the Fascist leadership for achieving Middle Eastern hegemony nor the policies it developed for this purpose were sufficient for the task.

The ill-fated Italian experiment at empire-building still bears political significance almost seventy years after its collapse. When the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi paid his first visit to Italy in June 2009, it was a picture of Umar al-Mukhtar in chains, surrounded by his Italian captors that he pinned to his uniform. Meanwhile the image of Mussolini entering a mosque in Derna and assuming symbolic patronage over the entire Muslim world has been forgotten.

Notes

Introduction

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6. G. D'Annunzio, *Laudi del cielo, del mare, della terra e degli eroi*, vol. I (Milano: Treves, [1903] 1917), pp. 304–7; R. Luperini & D. Brogi, *Letteratura e identità nazionale nel novecento* (Lecce: Manni, 2004), pp. 47–8; C. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy since 1796* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), pp. 374–5; C. G. Segrè *Fourth Shore: The Italian Colonization of Libya* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), p. 17; R. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of Mussolini and Fascism* (London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 99–100.
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8. R. A. Webster, *Industrial Imperialism in Italy, 1908–1915* (Berkley and London: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 191–243; Bosworth, 'Italy and the

End of the Ottoman Empire', pp. 67, 72 ; Labanca, *Oltremare*, pp. 158–9; Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 4, 63, 71; D. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (London and New York: Longman, 1976), pp. 32–3, 121.

9. Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach*, pp. 70, 82; A. A. Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya: State Formation, Colonization and Resistance, 1830–1932* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 105; S. Della Seta, 'La presenza e l'opera dei Salesiani in Palestina', *Storia Contemporanea*, 20, no. 1 (1989), pp. 81–101.
10. Weizmann to Lord Curzon, 2 February 1920, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, vol. IX (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1977), pp. 297–8.
11. Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach*, p. 76; D. G. Herrmann, 'The Paralysis of Italian Strategy in the Italian-Turkish War, 1911–1912', *The English Historical Review*, 104, no. 411 (1989), pp. 332–52; H. Bliss, 'The Italian Attack on Beirut', *MainGate: American University of Beirut Quarterly Magazine*, vol. 4, no. 3 and vol. 5, no. 1 (2006) at http://wwwlb.aub.edu.lb/~webmgate/article1.htm [viewed in December 2006]; P. Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 8–9.
12. Bosworth, 'Italy and the End of the Ottoman Empire', p. 64; Herrmann, 'The Paralysis of Italian Strategy', p. 333.
13. India Office Records (IOR), L/PS/11/1, Acting Italian Consul General in Aden to Political Resident, 22 December 1910; Aden to Political Department in Bombay, 24 December 1910.
14. R. Albrecht-Carrié, 'Italian Colonial Policy, 1914–1918', *The Journal of Modern History*, 18, no. 2 (1946), pp. 128–9; Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach*, p. 103; S. Minerbi, *L'Italie et la Palestine 1914–1920* (Paris: Presses Universitares de France, 1970), pp. 134–6.
15. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 430.
16. Sonnino to Imperiali, 16 February 1915, *Documenti Diplomatici Italiani* (*DDI*), 5, vol. II, pp. 692–6; Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 434.
17. House of Commons Parliamentary Papers Online, Cmd. 671, 'Agreement between France, Russia, Great Britain and Italy', 26 April 1915.
18. Minerbi, *L'Italie et la Palestine*, p. 136; IOR, L/PS/11/93/2064, Crowe to India Office, 2 June 1914. During the war British troops occupied the Kamaran Island off the Yemeni coast, while the Farsan Islands near Asir were captured by Idrisi. Britain recognized the Idrisi's possession of the islands in return for his agreeing not to surrender them to any other power. C. Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia 1925–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1983), p. 137.
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20. V. Strika, 'Le relazioni tra l'Italia e il Higaz (1916–1925)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 20, no. 2 (1989), pp. 181–2.
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22. The National Archives (TNA), FO 371/11448, E 4679, 'Italian claim to Farsan Islands'; D. Lloyd George, *Memoirs of the Peace Conference*, vol. II (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), pp. 584–5; S. Crespi, *Alla difesa d'Italia in guerra e a Versailles* (Milano: Mondadori, 1937), p. 565.

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24. P. Mantoux, *The Deliberations of the Council of Four (March 24–June 28, 1919)*, vol. I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 422, 450–5; D. Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914–1922* (London: Deutsch, 1989), pp. 392, 532; Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, p. 530.
25. N. Ferguson, *Empire* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 313.
26. Allenby to Robertson, 25 January 1918, in M. Hughes (ed.), *Allenby in Palestine: The Middle East Correspondence of Field Marshal Viscount Allenby June 1917–October 1919* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004), pp. 128–9; Minerbi, *L'Italie et la Palestine*, pp. 158–9, 210.
27. IOR, L/PS/11/175/5278a, 'Memorandum on the Cenacolo from the Consulta', in Count de Salis to Curzon, 28 June 1920.
28. TNA, HW 12/36, Schanzer to Rome, 27 June 1922; Schanzer to Tosti di Valminuta, 30 June 1922; Schanzer to Rome, 4 July 1922; FO 141/446/7, notes of conversation, 26 June 1922; L. I. Levine (ed.), *Jerusalem: Its Sanctity and Centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Continuum, 1999), pp. 488–9.
29. Manuel, 'The Palestine Question in Italian Diplomacy', p. 269.
30. In April 1927 the Italian Minister in Cairo, Gaetano Paternò, recommended increasing Italian influence in the Levant by nominating Italian rabbis to major Sephardic communities in the region. Paternò to Mussolini, 21 April 1927, *DDI*, 7, vol. 5, pp. 163–4.
31. Manuel, 'The Palestine Question in Italian Diplomacy', pp. 267–9, 278; Minerbi, *L'Italie et la Palestine*, pp. 141, 151; S. I. Minerbi, 'Italian diplomatic activity among Sephardic Jews, 1915–1929', *Peamim*, 12 (1982), pp. 59–85 [in Hebrew].
32. Bosworth, *The Italian Dictatorship*, p. 105.
33. E. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978), pp. 205–09.
34. R. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2002), p. 92.
35. This is what Mussolini told the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, during their meeting in October 1941. P. Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 102.
36. A. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 293.
37. 23 December 1937, G. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943* (London: Phoenix Press, 2002), pp. 38–9.
38. 3 January 1933, Baron P. Aloisi, *Journal, 25 Juillet 1932–14 Juin 1936* (Paris: Plon, 1957), p. 46.
39. 4 January 1939, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 173. For racial statements made by contemporaries serving in the Italian military see J. Gooch, 'Re-conquest and Suppression: Fascist Italy's Pacification of Libya and Ethiopia, 1929–39', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28, no. 6 (2005), pp. 1017, 1027–9; Bosworth, *Italy and the Wider World*, p. 104. See also Mussolini's comments to Göring during their conversation in Rome in April 1939. Unsigned memorandum, 16 April 1939, *Documents on German Foreign Policy* (DGFP), series D, vol. VI (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1961), p. 262.
40. B. Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini* (*OO*), vol. XIII, Edoardo & Duilio Susmel (eds) (Firenze: la Fenice, 1954), pp. 88–9.

41. Mussolini, *OO*, XVIII, pp. 76–8.
42. Ibid., pp. 244–6. This article was probably influenced by Mussolini's meeting with the pan-Islamic activist, Shakib Arslan.
43. G. Trevisonno, 'Mussolini, gli ebrei, l'Inghilterra e l'Islam', *Gerarchia*, XIX, no. 11 (1940), pp. 573–74.
44. Mussolini, *OO*, XIII, pp. 142–6; Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, p. 58.
45. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, pp. 10–13.
46. M. Kent, 'Guarding the Bandwagon: Great Britain, Italy, and Middle Eastern Oil, 1920–1923', in E. Ingram (ed.), *National and International Politics in the Middle East: Essays in Honor of Elie Kedourie* (London: Frank Cass, 1986), p. 156; D. Gilmour, *Curzon* (London: John Murray, 1994), p. 560; Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, pp. 24–32; Canali, *Mussolini e il petrolio iracheno*, pp. 149–56; Mussolini to Della Torretta, 22 November 1922; Della Torretta to Mussolini, 19 December 1922, *DDI*, 7, vol. I, pp. 91–4, 165–6.
47. J. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals: the armed forces and Fascist foreign policy, 1922–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 62, 64, 122, 189 et passim; Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, pp. 394–5; Knox, 'The Fascist Regime', p. 352.
48. Seton-Watson, *Italy from Liberalism to Fascism*, pp. 691–2; Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, p. 225. The transfer of Jubaland from British to Italian control was finally implemented on 15 July 1924.
49. TNA, FO 141/446/7, notes of conversation, 26 June 1922, pp. 3–4; 'Memorandum on Conversation with Signor Mussolini', 7 December 1924.
50. R. Guariglia, *Ricordi 1922–1946* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1949), pp. 37–42; Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, pp. 291–3.
51 *Oriente Moderno*, XV (July 1935), pp. 310–11; S. Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt 1935–1940* (London and New York: Frank Cass, 2005), p. 28; R. Quartararo, 'Imperial Defence in the Mediterranean on the Eve of the Ethiopian Crisis (July–October 1935)', *The Historical Journal*, 20 (1977), p. 189. The Hungarian explorer and intelligence officer, Count Ladislaus Almasy, drew the Italians' attention to the strategic importance of the region in April 1932. S. Kelly, *The Hunt for Zerzura* (London: John Murray, 2002), pp. 93, 104.
52. Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach*, p. 33.
53. See, for example, TNA, FO 371/18958, 'Italian Propaganda in Palestine', Wauchope to Colonial Office, 10 August 1935.
54. G. Ambrosini, *L'Italia nel Mediterraneo* (Foligno: Campitelli, 1927), pp. 206–7; *Oriente Moderno*, IX (October 1929), pp. 435–6.
55. Fabei, *Mussolini e la resistenza palestinese*, p. 8; Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, p. 53.
56. Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affair Esteri (ASMAE), Affari Politici 1931–1945 (hereafter AP), Palestina, b. 3, f. 2 'Stampa araba in Palestina', Gabbrielli to Foreign Ministry, 'Stampa locale araba', 10 May 1932; R. De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), pp. 150–1.
57. D. Carpi, 'Weizmann's Political Activity in Italy during the Years 1923–1934', *Zionism*, II (1971), p. 171 [in Hebrew]. According to Weizmann, Theodoli's anti-Zionist attitude was derived from personal reasons. The Marquis married a daughter of a rich Arab family from Beirut who had sold their lands in the Yizrael Valley to the Zionists. Theodoli and his relatives were displeased

with the low price they received. C. Weizmann, *Essay and Deed* (Tel Aviv: Shoken, 1953), pp. 362–4 [in Hebrew].
58. Pedrazzi to Mussolini, 19 May 1927, *DDI*, 7, vol. V, p. 217.
59. TNA, FO 371/12947, 'Record of conversation between Austen Chamberlain and Monsieur Berthelot', 29 June 1928.
60. Italicus, 'L'indipendenza egiziana', *Gerarchia*, 12, no. 7–8, (1932), p. 631.
61. Carpi, 'Weizmann's Political Activity in Italy', pp. 185–91.
62. Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico della Marina Militare, Direttivi Generali, D 9/A1, 'Pro-memoria n. 41: Considerazioni sull'isole italiane dell'Egeo', 10 February 1932. I am greatly indebted to Prof. John Gooch for this information.
63. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 10, f. 1 'Cessazione del mandato sulla Siria', Buti to Suvich, 28 May 1934 and 4 September 1934. For Italian obstruction of a Franco-Syrian agreement, see 'Note de la Sous-Direction d'Afrique-Levant', 28 March 1933, *Documents Diplomatiques Français* (DDF), 1, vol. III, pp. 100–02.
64. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 10, f. 2 'Stampa', Suvich to Ciano, 11 October [1934].
65. TNA, FO 371/11448, E 4679, 'Text of treaty of April, 1915 [between Britain and Asir]'.
66. A. Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*, vol. II*: La conquista dell'Impero* (Roma–Bari: Laterza, 1979), pp. 44–9; Quartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen', p. 820.
67. Labanca, *Oltremare*, p. 148; Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale*, vol. II, pp. 44–9; Quartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen', pp. 823–24.
68. Mussolini to Federzoni, 17 June 1928, *DDI*, 7, vol. VI, pp. 360–1; TNA, HW 12/120, De Bono to Zoli, 1 July 1929; Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale,* vol. II, pp. 44–9.
69. TNA, HW 12/130, De Bono to Zoli, 14 March 1930; Qartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen', pp. 836, 848, 858. For the broader context of Italo-Russian collaboration in the Arabian Peninsula, see J. Clavitt Clarke, *Russia and Italy Against Hitler: The Bolshevik-Fascist Rapprochement of the 1930s* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 32.
70. Zoli to Guariglia, 21 December 1929, *DDI*, 7, vol. VIII, p. 301.
71. Buti to Mussolini, 23 September 1932; Suvich to Mussolini, 28 December 1932, *DDI*, 7, vol. XII, pp. 385–6, 701; Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia dell'amicizia*, pp. 38–9.
72. H. Erlich, 'Mussolini and the Middle East in the 1920s', in Uriel Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919–1939* (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 1988), p. 217.
73. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, p. 291; Mussolini to Orsini Baroni, 24 November 1925, *DDI*, 7, vol. IV, pp. 134–5.
74. De Cicco (Beirut) to Mussolini, 5 December 1928; De Cicco to Mussolini, 13 June 1929, *DDI*, 7, vol. VII, pp. 118–19, 476–8; Guariglia to De Cicco, 7 April 1930, *DDI*, 7, vol. VIII, p. 582; Amedeo Fani to Giuriati (Aleppo), 18 August 1930, *DDI*, 7, vol. IX, pp. 294–5.
75. Guariglia, *Ricordi 1922–1946*, p. 38; TNA, FO 141/446, 'Memorandum by Mr. Ingram respecting British and Italian Interests in the North-East Corner of Africa', 8 January 1924. Despite Italian concerns, Rome had few reasons to complain about British conduct which, on the whole, exhibited considerable colonial collaboration.
76. L. Goglia, 'La politica indigena di Balbo Governatore Generale della Libia', in C. M. Santoro (ed.), *Italo Balbo: aviazione e potere aereo* (Roma: Aeronautica

Militare, 1998), p. 288; Gooch, 'Re-conquest and Suppression', pp. 1019–21; Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, pp. 496–97; Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia*, pp. 179–89; Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya*, pp. 138–40. On the difficulty of estimating the exact number of Libyans who died in the camps see L. Goglia, 'A proposito di una biografia su Italo Balbo', *Africa*, XLII, no. 1 (1987), pp. 152–7.

77. F. Cresti, 'Il professore e il generale: la polemica tra Carlo Alfonso Nallino e Rodolfo Graziani sulla senussia e su altre questioni libiche', *Studi Storici*, 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 1113–17; M. Kabha, *Journalism in the Eye of the Storm: The Palestinian Press Shapes Public Opinion 1929–1939* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2004), p. 83 [in Hebrew].
78. Del Boca, *Gli Italiani in Libia*, p. 209; *Oriente Moderno*, XI (1931), pp. 492, 581; Bordonaro (London) to Grandi, 14 March 1932, *DDI*, 7, vol. XI, p. 483.
79. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 3, f. 4 'Congresso islamico a Gerusalemme', Embassy in London to Foreign Ministry, 21 December 1931; Cantalupo (Cairo) to Foreign Ministry, 13 January 1932; 'Il Congresso Musulmano di Gerusalemme', *La Terra Santa*, XII, no. 1 (1932), pp. 10–12; Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, pp. 61–3.
80. See, for example, 'Congrès Pan-Islamique' and 'Les atrocités italiennes fasciste en Tripolitanie', *La Nation Arabe*, no. 10–11 (Novembre–Decembre 1931), pp. 1–22, 44–7.
81. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 3, f. 4 'Congresso islamico a Gerusalemme', Husayni to Italian Foreign Minister, 28 March 1932 and 30 March 1932.
82. Gabbrielli to Foreign Ministry, 12 August 1932, *DDI*, 7, vol. XI, p. 141. The British reaction to these allegations was that these articles were 'merely quotations from articles originally published in other countries'. TNA, FO 371/16054, draft of letter to Signor Mameli, January 1932. The Italians later employed a similar excuse to justify their anti-British propaganda.
83. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, p. 395; R. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce, vol. I. Gli anni del consenso 1929–1936* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi, 1974), pp. 408–13, 418–67.
84. E. De Bono, 'Ieri e oggi in colonia', *Gerarchia*, 12, no. 7–8 (1932), pp. 523–32; E. De Bono, *Anno XIIII: the Conquest of an Empire*, B. Miall trans. (London: The Shenval Press, 1937), pp. 12–13; M. Michaelis, 'Italy's Mediterranean Strategy, 1935–1939', in M. Cohen and M. Kolinski, *Britain and the Middle East in the 1930's* (London: Macmillan Press, 1992), p. 45; E. M. Robertson, *Mussolini as Empire-Builder. Europe and Africa, 1932–36* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 34.
85. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, pp. 353–76.
86. ASMAE, Gabinetto del ministro e della segreteria generale, 1923–43 (hear-after: Gab.) 742, 'Appunto in data 29 marzo 1933 (XI) iniziale del Servizio Segreto circa l'Oriente mussulmano'. Mussolini's 'M' appears on the right hand corner of the first page, signifying he had read the document. The author of this memorandum is unknown.
87. 30 March 1933, Aloisi, *Journal*, p. 104.
88. R. De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente: arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini* (Bologna, il Mulino, 1988), p. 17.
89. 21 December 1933, Aloisi, *Journal*, pp. 168–69; IOR, L/PS/12/107/2629, Drummond to Foreign Office, 19 December 1933. Giovanni Gentile, one of the leading intellectuals of the Fascist movement, was the first President

of this Institute. In 1934 a second congress for Asiatic students was held in Rome.

90. IOR, L/PS/12/107/2629, 'Mussolini's speech at the Quinquennial Fascist Assembly', 18 March 1934.
91. Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B0539, 'Il discorso del Duce a Bari', 6 September 1934.
92. Cassels, *Mussolini's Early Diplomacy*, p. 216.
93. Goglia, 'La politica indigena di Balbo', p. 290; Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Libia*, p. 236.
94. C. G. Segrè, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 321; Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, p. 88.
95. Gooch, 'Re-conquest and Suppression', p. 1009; Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B1364, 'Una riunione tra i capi e i notabili indigeni della Libia Orientale', 31 August 1938.
96. Segrè, *Fourth Shore*, p. 151.
97. ASMAE, Ambasciata al Cairo, no. 284, f. 2 'Libia – a. Dati statistici da fuoriusciti libici rimpatriati'.
98. ASMAE, Ambasciata Londra, b. 814, f. 1 'Raccolta rassegna stampa del console a Gerusalemme'.
99. W. Cleveland, *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1985), p. 201.
100. ASMAE, Gab. 742, 'Appunto in data 29 marzo 1933 (XI) iniziale del Servizio Segreto circa l'Oriente mussulmano'. The informant appears to have been Jabiri.
101. 30 March 1933, Aloisi, *Journal*, p. 104; Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1237.
102. Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Udienze, b. 3113; ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 10. Memorandum by Arslan and Jabiri: 'La question Libienne', no date [1934].
103. Cleveland, *Islam Against the West*, pp. 145–6. For a variety of Arslan's articles and publications defending his pro-Italian position see ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 14, f. 1 'Rapporti politici'.
104. In September of that year Jabiri told his Palazzo Chigi counterpart that he had been promised 'two million yearly for a period of three to four years', of which 'he has received up till now half a million [Italian] lire'. Mussolini, whose signature appears on the document, underlined this sentence and drew a small question mark next to the word 'two'. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Mussolini, 4 September 1934.
105. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 8, f. 3 'Società anonima di navigazione Eritrea (1931–1932)', memorandum, 20 October 1931; report for Mussolini, December 1931.
106. Quartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen', pp. 830–1, 851.
107. 3 May 1934, Aloisi, *Journal*, p. 187.
108. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 5, f. 7 'Conflitto tra Yemen e Arabia Saudita (gennaio – aprile)'; b. 6, Mussolini to Embassy in London, 6 May 1934; De Bono to Astuto, 29 May 1934; Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, pp. 154–9.
109. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 14, report for Suvich, 2 May 1935. The document bears Mussolini's 'M', who also wrote 'si' with a blue pen on its first page.
110. ASMAE, Gab. 742, 'Appunto in data 29 marzo 1933 (XI) iniziale del Servizio Segreto circa l'Oriente mussulmano'.

111. De Angelis to Mussolini, 4 May 1933, *DDI*, 7, vol. XIII, pp. 585–7.
112. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 7, Dubbiosi to Foreign Ministry, 27 June 1934; Astuto to Ministry for the Colonies, 1 July 1934, 3 July 1934 and 6 July 1934; Note for Mussolini, 14 December 1934, *DDI*, 7, vol. XVI, pp. 303–4.
113. C. Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano (1882–1941)* (Varese: Giuffrè, 1982), pp. 105–6; A. Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo* (Roma: Istituto per l'Oriente, 1997), pp. 35–9.
114. R. Cantalupo, *L'Italia musulmana* (Bologna: Longanesi, 1928), pp. 390–7.
115. C. Burdett, *Journeys through Fascism* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2007), pp. 26–33.
116. 'Sionismo', *Rassegna Nazionale*, XLVIII, vol. LI (1926), pp 233–4.
117. R. Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre: How Rival Christians Came Together to Rescue Their Holiest Shrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 68–72.
118. Cresti, 'Il professore', pp. 1113–49; M. Giro, 'L'Istituo per l'Oriente dalla fondazione alla seconda guerra mondiale', *Storia Contemporanea*, 17, no. 6 (1988), pp. 1152–53.
119. E. Rossi, 'Il fascismo nel Vicino Oriente', *Gerarchia*, XII, no. 10 (1932), pp. 843–47.
120. Mario Tedeschini Lalli's interview with Enrico Nuné, 10 October 1993.
121. G. E. Carretto, '<Sapere> e <potere>: L'istituto per l'Orient (1921–1943)', in *Annali della Facolta di Scienze Politiche dell'Universita di Cagliari* (Cagliari, 1983), p. 218; Giro, 'L'Istituo per l'Oriente', p. 1153.
122. M. Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 149–51; TNA, FO 371/18958, 'Italian Propaganda in Palestine', Wauchope to Colonial Office, 10 August 1935.
123. Burdett, *Journeys through Fascism*, pp. 33–7; I. Tambaro, 'L'istituto dei Mandati e la loro fase risolutiva', *L'Africa Italiana*, LII, nos 1 and 2 (marzo – giugno 1934), pp. 22–39; G. Ambrosini, 'La politica araba dell'Inghilterra e della Francia in Palestina e in Siria', *Civiltà fascista*, VI, no. 8 (agosto 1939); R. Tritonj, 'La fase attuale del problema siriano', *Nuova Antologia*, 69, no. 1489 (1 aprile 1934), pp. 428–36.
124. N. Tranfaglia, P. Murialdi and M. Legnani, *La stampa italiana nell'eta fascista* (Bari: Laterza, 1980), p. 146; E. Serra, *La diplomazia in Italia* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1984), pp. 42–3.
125. M. G. Pasqualini, *Gli equilibri nel Levante* (Palermo: Edizioni Associate, 1995), p. 99; M. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda araba del fascismo e l'Egitto', *Storia Contemporanea*, 7, no. 6 (1976), p. 722.
126. Y. Arnon-Ochana, *The Internal Struggle within the Palestinian Movement* (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1981), p. 199 [in Hebrew].
127. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 10, f. 2 'Stampa', Caruso to Foreign Ministry, 7 April 1934; note for Ciano, 25 October 1934; memorandum for the Director General of Office III, 30 January 1934; note prepared by Office III in the Foreign Ministry, 17 October 1934.
128. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Direzione Generale dei Servizi della Propaganda (DGSP), b. 198, f. 'Siria 1934', Ciano to Lessona, 16 November 1934.
129. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 10, f. 12, 'Espansione italiana in Siria', note by Buti, 18 December 1933; De Cicco to Foreign Ministry, 1 May 1934.

130. Pasqualini, *Gli equilibri nel Levante*, pp. 107–8; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (June 1935), p. 267.
131. The Allied forces that reached Bari in September 1943 found an ill-equipped radio station which was only capable of transmitting on medium wave. Pietro Badoglio noted that 'Radio Bari was so weak that it could hardly be heard in Rome'. In the 1930s the British estimated that the broadcasts from Bari on medium wave were re-transmitted on shortwave from Rome, but this is unlikely, since the people who took part in Bari's Arabic programmes, such as Enrico Nuné and Selim Cattan, lived and worked in Rome. In order not to be inconsistent with the sources quoted below I shall refer to the station as Radio Bari. See US National Archives, Washington, Office of Strategic Services, Research & Analysis Branch, R & A number 1251: 'Italian Propaganda Organization', p. 21; P. Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 88.
132. *Oriente Moderno*, XIV (June 1934), p. 272.
133. 24 January 1938, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 50.
134. Mario Tedeschini Lalli's interview with Enrico Nuné, 10 October 1993; Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', p. 730. Selim Cattan did not actually leave the Ministry of Press and Propaganda. He worked for the ministry's foreign press department at least until July 1938. Cattan also served as a consultant on Arab affairs to the Foreign Ministry. M. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La politica italiana in Egitto negli anni trenta e il movimento delle "camicie verdi"', *Storia Contemporanea*, 17, no. 6 (1986), p. 1187; Y. Halperin, *Revival of Hebrew Seamanship* (Re'ot, 2001), p. 126 [in Hebrew].
135. E. Almog, 'The Beginning of Radio Broadcasts in Palestine: Zionist or Mandatory Interests?', in Y. Ben Arieh (ed.), *Jerusalem and the British Mandate* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2003), p. 233 [in Hebrew]; TNA, FO 371/21159, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 13 July 1937; C. A. MacDonald, 'Radio Bari: Italian Wireless Propaganda in the Middle East and British Countermeasures 1934–1938', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 13 (1977), p. 195; Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria*, p. 83.
136. Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria*, p. 4.
137. Erlich, 'Periphery and Youth', pp. 401, 408.
138. Ibid., p. 413; Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, pp. 258–9; Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria*, pp. 102–3; S. Wild, 'National Socialism in the Arab near East between 1933 and 1939', *Die Welt des Islams*, 25 (1985) p. 136; Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, p. 7.
139. J. Heller, 'The Failure of Fascism in Jewish Palestine, 1925–1948', in S. Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism Outside Europe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 365–69; Z. Jabotinsky, *Letters*, vol. III (Jerusalem, 1936), pp. 337–40 [in Hebrew]; ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 4, note for Suvich, 28 July 1933; D. Carpi, A. Milano and A. Rofé (eds), *Scritti in memoria di Leone Carpi* (Milan and Jerusalem: Fondazione Sally Mayer, 1967), pp. 34–5; V. Pinto, 'Between *imago* and *res*: the Revisionist-Zionist Movement's Relationship with Fascist Italy, 1922–1938', *Israel Affairs*, 10, no. 3 (2004), p. 96.
140. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 5, sf. 1 'Fascismo in Palestina' [1933].
141. Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism,* pp. 113–29.
142. Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, p. 113.

143. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 3, f. 2 'Stampa araba in Palestina', Gabbrielli to Foreign Ministry, 10 May 1932 and Gabbrielli to Foreign Ministry, 12 October 1932; Ambasciata Londra, b. 814, f. 1 'Raccolta rassegna stampa del console a Gerusalemme' [1933].
144. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 5, f. 7 'Conflitto tra Yemen e Arabia Saudita (gennaio – aprile)', clipping from *Lataif*, 2 April 1934.
145. ASMAE, Ambasciata Londra, b. 814, f. 1 'Raccolta rassegna stampa del console a Gerusalemme', *Jama'a al-Arabyyia*, 21 June 1933.
146. Y. L. Rizk, 'Close to Italy', *Al-Ahram Weekly Online* (25–31 December 2003) at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2003/670/chrncls.htm [viewed in December 2006].
147. V. Ianari, *Chiesa, coloni e islam* (Torino: SEI, 1995), pp. 107–10.
148. Oriani, *La rivolta ideale*, p. 276.

2 In the Shadow of Ethiopia, 1935–June 1936

1. I. Silone, *Vino e pane* (Milano: Mondadori, [1937] 1955), p. 104 [my translation].
2. D. C. Watt, 'The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia', in E. M. Robertson (ed.), *The Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 225–42.
3. L. Pratt, *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 16.
4. See, for example, A. Marder, 'The Royal Navy and the Ethiopian Crisis, 1935–36', *The American Historical Review*, 75, no. 5 (1970), pp. 1327–56; A. L. Goldman, 'Sir Robert Vansittart's Search for Italian Cooperation against Hitler, 1933–36', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9 (1974), pp. 93–132; R. Mallett, 'The Italian Naval High Command and the Mediterranean Crisis, January–October 1935', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 22, no. 4 (1999), pp. 77–102; Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt*, pp. 40–85. For a somewhat unorthodox analysis of the crisis, see Quartararo, 'Imperial Defence in the Mediterranean', pp. 186–220.
5. Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt*, p. 41.
6. Knox, *Common Destiny*, p. 140; A. Pirelli, *Taccuini 1922/1943*, D. Barbone (ed.) (Bologna: il Mulino, 1984), p. 124.
7. G. Rochat, *Militari e politici nella preparazione della campagna d'Etiopia: studio e documenti 1932–1936* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1971), pp. 225–7.
8. Drummond to Hoare, 22 August 1935, *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (*DBFP*), 2, vol. XIV, p. 528.
9. TNA, CAB 16/136, Sub-Committee on Defence Policy and Requirements, minutes of meeting, 23 August 1935; H. J. Burgwyn, *Italian Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918–1940* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), pp. 116–20; M. Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East: Strategy and Diplomacy, 1936–42* (London: Macmillan, 1999), p. 18; Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt*, p. 40.
10. Mussolini to Ghigi, 6 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 47–8; Ministero della Difesa, *L'esercito italiano tra la 1a e la 2a guerra mondiale, novembre 1918–giugno 1940* (Roma, 1954), pp. 176–8.

11. The secret affairs section ('sezione affari segreti') of the cabinet to Mussolini, 3 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 23–5. Jabiri named Nahhas Pasha, the leader of the Wafd party, as being the most prominent Egyptian figure, but was very doubtful whether Nahhas would collaborate with Italy without receiving far-reaching Italian assurances. Jabiri suggested initiating anti-British revolts all across the Middle East and asked to receive money and arms for this purpose, an offer the Italian cabinet ignored.
12. Grandi to Mussolini, 19 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 134–6; D. Grandi, *Il mio paese. Ricordi autobiografici*, R. De Felice (ed.) (Bologna: il Mulino, 1985), p. 396; De Felice, *Mussolini il duce,* vol. I, p. 680; Mallett, *The Italian Navy*, p. 34; Rochat, *Militari e politici*, pp. 225–9; F. Suvich, *Memorie 1932–1936*, G. Bianchi (ed.) (Milano: Rizzoli, 1984), p. 289. The King wrote to Mussolini on 7 August 1935, warning that a clash with Britain would have grave consequences for Italy. He added that French support could not be counted upon, since the French, if forced to choose, would prefer British over Italian friendship. Badoglio implored Mussolini to avoid having Italy reduced to a 'Balkan level'. Mussolini later wrote that 'When the English fleet appeared in the Mediterranean in September, Marshal Badoglio had a bad attack of nerves'. B. Mussolini, *Memoirs 1942–1943*, R. Klibansky (ed.) (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 174.
13. M. Toscano, *The History of Treaties and International Politics* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1966), p. 30; C. Andrew and V. Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 35–6, 49–54, 67–9, 78.
14. Meeting between Mussolini and Drummond, 23 September 1935; Cerruti (Paris) to Mussolini, 28 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 149, 180–1.
15. S. Morewood, 'Anglo-Italian Rivalry in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940', in R. Boyce and E. Robertson (eds), *Paths to War: New Essays on the Origins of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 179; Marder, 'The Royal Navy', p. 1335. The British garrison in Egypt normally numbered 11,000 troops, though during the crisis their number was brought up to 15,500.
16. R. Mallett, *Mussolini and the Origins of the Second World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 50; F. Minniti, 'Il nemico vero: Gli obiettivi dei piani di operazione contro la Gran Bretagna nel contesto etiopico', *Storia Contemporanea*, 26, no. 4 (1995), p. 584.
17. Hoare to Drummond, 4 October 1935; Hoare to Drummond, 17 October 1935, *DBFP*, 2, vol. XV, pp. 25–6, 124–5.
18. De Bono, *Anno XIIII*, p. 273.
19. Mallett, *The Italian Navy*, pp. 75–7; Minniti, *Fino alla Guerra*, pp. 123, 127–30; Minniti, 'Gli obiettivi dei piani', pp. 597–8; Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 345.
20. D. Dilks, 'British Reaction to Italian Empire-Building 1936–1939', in E. Serra and C. Seton-Watson (eds), *Italia e Inghilterra nell'età dell'imperialismo* (Milano: ISPI, 1990), p. 168; Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, p. 19.
21. TNA, FO 141/659, pamphlet '*l'Abyssine esclavagiste*'; Keown-Boyd to Smart, 13 October 1935.
22. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Reports, b. 5, Pagliano to Ciano, 24 March 1935.

23. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', pp. 745–6.
24. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, b. 10, f. 'Ambasciata d'Italia in Egitto – Sovvenzioni propaganda (1935–1944)'.
25. Ismailia Damiani (*Bourse Egyptienne*) and Ahmad Mansur Mutawad (from the Alexandria based *Al-Basir*) both received five Egyptian pounds a month. Anis Daud received 12 Egyptian pounds a month for articles in Arabic in the paper *Kawkab al-Sharq* and for providing a contact with the Coptic Patriarch. British authorities in Egypt suspected Daud of being the contact person between the Italian legation in Cairo and ultra-nationalist politicians such as the leaders of Young Egypt and Hafiz Ramadan. TNA, FO 371/19078, 'The activities in Egypt of Commendatore Ugo Dadone', 19 November 1935; FO 371/19075, Kelly to Hoare, 4 September 1935.
26. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', p. 741; ASMAE, Gab. b. 557, Ghigi to Press and Propaganda Ministry, 31 August 1936; TNA, FO 141/659, Kelly to Hoare, 13 September 1935.
27. ASMAE, Gab. b. 557, Ghigi to Press and Propaganda Ministry, 31 August 1936. In late August 1936, following the Italian victory in Ethiopia, Ghigi felt optimistic regarding the future of Italo-Egyptian relations and thus sought to reduce the monthly payments to Egyptian newspapers by 50 per cent.
28. The Egyptian Pound was tied to the British Pound. One Pound Sterling was worth 0.975 Egyptian Pound.
29. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 12, f. 5 'stampa'; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 198, f. 'Siria 1935' and f. 'Siria 1936'.
30. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 135, f. 'Iraq 1935', Baghdad to Foreign Ministry and Press and Propaganda Ministry, 5 August 1935; note for the Director General of the Service for Foreign Press, 26 September 1935; TNA, HW 12/198, Alfieri to Italian legation in Baghdad, 2 December 1935.
31. TNA, FO 141/659, Clark to Hoare, 25 November 1935.
32. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', pp. 735–7.
33. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto', Suvich to London, War Ministry (SIM), Ministry for the Colonies, Paris and Geneva, 14 January 1936.
34. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 2, Suvich to Minister for Press and Propaganda, 10 February 1936; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 62, f. 'Egitto 1936'.
35. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 30; TNA, CO 733/299/12; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 62, f. 'Egitto 1936'; b. 198, f. 'Siria 1935' and f. 'Siria 1936'. The Press and Propaganda Ministry also distributed materials in English and in French regarding the Fascist regime and the war in Ethiopia to a list of recipients in Damascus, Aleppo and Beirut.
36. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 62, f. 'Egitto 1936'.
37. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', p. 727.
38. TNA, FO 371/18958, 'Bari – 15/6/1935' and 'Transcript broadcast from Bari on the 10th September'; Quartararo, *Roma tra Londra e Berlino*, p. 222. There is a methodological problem with analysing the broadcasts of Radio Bari. I have not been able to find full transcripts of the broadcasts in Italian sources, though excerpts occasionally appear in the files of the Ministry for Popular Culture and the Foreign Ministry. Most of the citations from Bari

in this study are taken from British authorities who followed the broadcasts (though not always systematically) from Palestine, Egypt and elsewhere. In some cases, British monitoring stations offered slightly different versions of the same transmission. For French summaries of Radio Bari's programmes from September 1937 onwards see: D. J. Grange, 'Structure et techniques d'une propaganda: Les émissions de Radio Bari', *Relations Internationales*, 2 (1974), pp. 165–85.

39. TNA, FO 371/19077, 'Radio Bari Broadcasts', 17 October 1935; FO 141/659, 'Extracts from Radio Bari Broadcasts', 15 November 1935.
40. TNA, FO 395/558, 'Report on Arabic Broadcasting in Egypt and Palestine' written by J. Heyworth-Dunne, 20 January 1938.
41. S. K. Aburish, *Children of Bethany* (Or Yehuda: Zmora-Bitan, 2002), p. 56 [Hebrew translation].
42. Rossi supported this request, commenting that the Armenians have an important 'commercial and moral' position in the Middle East. On 10 September Alfieri replied that the Press and Propaganda Ministry did not intend to commence broadcasts in Armenian. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 12, f. 5 'stampa'.
43. TNA, FO 141/659, 'Extracts from Radio Bari Broadcasts', 14 November 1935.
44. See, for example, TNA, FO 371/18958, 'Bari – 15/6/1935'; '14.10.35 – Bari Broadcasts 8.20 p.m. Alexandria'; 'Bari Station – Tuesday, 5 November 1935'.
45. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 12, f. 5 'stampa'.
46. TNA, FO 141/659, 'Extracts from Radio Bari Broadcasts', 22 October 1935. The discovery of a consignment of arms hidden in cement barrels at the port of Jaffa on 15 October 1935 triggered an angry Arab response. Bari's linkage between this consignment and the war in Ethiopia seems to be an attempt to raise Arab support for the Italian cause. The mention of 'Arab soldiers in Eritrea' probably refers to the Libyan troops that were sent to Eritrea.
47. H. Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2007), p. 49.
48. P. Borruso, *L'Ultimo Impero Cristiano, politica e religione nell'Etiopia contemporanea (1916–1974*) (Milano: Guerini, 2002), pp. 147–9; Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, p. 42.
49. ASMAE, Gab. b. 561, 'Rapporti sui musulmani di Etiopia inviati in Arabo dall'Emiro Chekib Arslan', 28 February 1935.
50. These efforts were eventually headed by the former Governor of Eritrea, Jacopo Gasparini. Though he was probably exaggerating, De Bono claimed that Italian subversion ultimately prevented 200,000 potential fighting men from joining the armies of Haile Selassie. De Bono, *Anno XIIII*, p. 54.
51. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 14, f. 1, Cairo to Foreign Ministry, 25 February 1936; Damascus to Foreign Ministry, 19 May 1936; copy of publication: 'Aucune propagande au monde ne peut défigurer le portrait d'un homme: La vérité aura toujours le dernier mot'.
52. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 14, f. 1, unsigned note, 28 May 1936.
53. A. Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo italiano in Etiopia 1936–1940* (Milano: Mursia, 1980), pp. 207, 210–11; Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, pp. 42, 58. For more on the Italian conquest of Ethiopia see A. Del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale, vol. II*.

54. M. Lampson, *Politics and Diplomacy in Egypt: The Diaries of Sir Milses Lampson* (Oxford: The British Academy, 1997), p. 311; ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto', Ghigi to Mussolini, 7 October 1935.
55. TNA, FO 141/659, Chief Signal Officer to HQ, British troops in Egypt, 15 November 1935; FO 371/19078, Lampson to Foreign Office, 18 November 1935; MacDonald, 'Radio Bari', p. 199.
56. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto', Ghigi to Foreign Ministry, 27 November 1935; Ghigi to Mussolini, 18 December 1935; *Parliamentary Debates*, fifth series, vol. 307, House of Commons, Deb. 5, 16 December 1935, p. 1383. Eden was asked to what extent the student riots in Egypt were due to Italian anti-British propaganda and replied that he had not obtained information on this matter.
57. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto', Grandi to Cairo, 5 January 1936; Suvich to Ministry for the Colonies, War Ministry, London, Paris and Geneva, 14 January 1936; Ghigi to Mussolini, 21 February 1936.
58. On the other hand, some in Whitehall believed 'that Sir Miles Lampson is unduly pessimistic about the danger of Italian aims'. See the comments on his dispatch: TNA, FO 371/19979, Lampson to Foreign Office, 18 December 1936.
59. TNA, CAB 23/84, Meeting on 22 April 1936; CAB 24/262, 'Anglo-Egyptian Treaty Conversations', 8 June 1936.
60. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', pp. 718–19; A. Christie, *Death on the Nile* (London: Harper Collins, 2001), p. 163.
61. See, for example, M. J. Cohen, 'British Strategy and the Palestine Question 1936–39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7 (1972), pp. 157–83; Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, pp. 18–31; Kelly, *The Hunt for Zerzura*, p. 126.
62. See, for example, Tedeschini Lalli, 'La propaganda', p. 717; R. De Felice, 'Arabi e Medio Oriente', pp. 1258–60; De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, p. 19; G. Alegi, *Ali sul deserto* (Roma: Stato Maggiore Aeronautica, 1994), p. 23.
63. Mussolini to Pagliano, 26 April 1935; Suvich to Pagliano, 29 April 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, pp. 74, 96.
64. Mussolini to Ghigi, 6 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 47–8.
65. Mussolini to Ghigi, 6 November 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, p. 546; TNA, FO 141/659, 'Extracts from Radio Bari Broadcasts', 15 November 1935; FO 371/19077, 'Extracts from Radio Bari Broadcasts', 14 November 1935.
66. Lampson to Hoare, 12 July 1935, *DBFP*, 2, vol. XIV, pp. 376–77.
67. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5, 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto', Ramadan to Mussolini, 15 January 1936; Mussolini to Cairo, 18 January 1936; Ramadan to Mussolini, 29 January 1936; b. 14, f. 7, note for Suvich, 12 February 1936.
68. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto', Nonis (Cairo) to Foreign Ministry, 13 February 1936.
69. TNA, FO 141/762/4, Lampson to Eden, 4 April 1936.
70. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 5 'Pretesa propaganda italiana in Egitto'.
71. TNA, CAB 24/262, Eden's Memoranda on the negotiations from April until June 1936; 'Anglo-Egyptian Treaty Conversations', May 1936; Dilks, 'British Reaction to Italian Empire-Building', p. 167.
72. ASMAE, Gab. b. 557, Mussolini to Cairo, 7 April 1936; Mussolini to Grandi, 2 April 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. III, pp. 624–5.

73. Mussolini to Ghigi, 8 April 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. III, p. 669.
74. TNA, HW 12/203, De Angelis to Rome, 3 April 1936.
75. TNA, CAB 24/262, 'Anglo-Egyptian Treaty Conversations', 8 June 1936.
76. A. Ayalon, 'Egyptian Intellectuals versus Fascism and Nazism in the 1930's', in U. Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919–1939* (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 1988), p. 402; Erlich, 'Periphery and Youth', p. 417; Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, pp. 192–279.
77. Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, pp. 210, 217–33, 341.
78. H. Erlich, 'Egypt, Ethiopia and "The Abyssinian Crisis", 1935–1936', in H. Erlich and I. Gershoni (eds), *The Nile: Histories, Cultures, Myths* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 185–9; Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, pp. 254–7. For Italian apprehensions surrounding pro-Ethiopian activity in Egypt, see: ASMAE, Gab. 240, 'La situazione politica in Egitto e la questione etiopica', 24 August 1935; TNA, HW 12/195, Rome to Alexandria, 20 August 1935.
79. Erlich, 'Egypt, Ethiopia and "The Abyssinian Crisis"', pp. 190–4; Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, pp. 261–3.
80. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 14, f. 7 'Partito nazionalista egiziano – camicie azzure', Cairo to Foreign Ministry, 2 September 1935; J. P. Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1975), p. 20.
81. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 3 'Associazione Giovane Egitto', Foreign Ministry to Ministries for the Colonies, War, Navy, Air Force, London, Paris and Geneva, 12 October 1935. Ghigi, who had only arrived in Cairo some two months earlier, did not think it was time yet to move on to more concrete agreements.
82. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 3 'Associazione Giovane Egitto'.
83. Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, p. 278.
84. TNA, HW 12/194, Mussolini to Italian legation, 8 August 1935.
85. ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 14, f. 1 'Conflitto italo-etiopico: atteggiamento comunità italiane in Egitto'.
86. TNA, HW 12/194, Rome to Italian legation, 20 August 1935.
87. ACS, Ministero della Marina, Gabinetto 1936, b. 37, Naval Ministry to Colonies Ministry, 8 May 1936; Memorandum written by Bertelli [undated]. The files compiled during this period by SIM include photographs and detailed plans of the airfield and the naval base of Alexandria. Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (hereafter: AUSSME), H3, Racc. 40, f. 3 'Egitto e territori contermini all'Etiopia', 1 May 1936.
88. Kelly, *The Hunt for Zerzura*, p. 115; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Reports, b. 5, Report no. 38 'Fascist propaganda in Egypt. Comm. Ugo Dadone', Morganti to S. Mazzolini, 31 October 1938.
89. TNA, FO 371/19075, British Consulate in Port Said to Kelly, 29 August 1935; ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 14, f. 1, Conti to Cairo, 29 August 1935.
90. TNA, FO 141/762/4, Keown-Boyd to the First Secretary of the Residency, 7 June 1936; HW 12/205, Ghigi to Rome, 8 June 1936.
91. Alegi, *Ali sul deserto*, pp. 29–47. The pilots remained in Italy until March 1936.
92. Persico to Mussolini, 15 April 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, pp. 8–11.
93. Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, p. 45.
94. Meeting between Mussolini and Fuad Hamza, 22 May 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, pp. 282–4; TNA, HW 12/198, Persico to Foreign Ministry, 11 November

1935; Foreign Ministry to Italian legation in Jeddah, 12 November 1935; HW 12/197, Persico to Foreign Ministry, 15 November 1935; FO 371/19020, 'Fuad Hamza and the Italians'. The person who received the money was not named in the intercepted message. However, British Foreign Office officials believed, correctly it seems, that this person was Hamza.

95. De Bono, *Anno XIIII*, pp. 80–2.
96. ASMAE, Gab. b. 519, f. 2, report by Persico, no date [after 15 February 1936].
97. AUSSME, H3, Racc. 5B, f. 1 'Fornitura governo saudiano', De Bono to War Ministry, 2 August 1935.
98. Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, p. 51.
99. Persico to Mussolini, 15 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 101–2; AUSSME, H3, Racc. 40, f. 1 'Regno Arabo Saudiano', Secret letter to Roatta, 5 September 1935.
100. Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, p. 52.
101. AUSSME, H3, Racc. 5B, f. 1 'Fornitura governo saudiano', De Bono to War Ministry, 31 August 1935.
102. Persico to Mussolini, 15 September 1935; Mussolini to De Bono, 17 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 101–2; TNA, HW 12/195, Persico to Foreign Ministry, 7 September 1935.
103. ASMAE, Gab. b. 519, f. 2, De Bono to War Ministry and Ministry for the Colonies, 14 October 1935; Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia dell'amicizia*, p. 91.
104. TNA, HW 12/194, Ibn Saud to Faisal, 16 July 1935; HW 12/197, Yasin to Ibn Saud, 1 October 1935; HW 12/198, Hamza to Ibn Saud, 7 November 1935.
105. De Bono, *Anno XIIII*, pp. 80–2. For more details on the transaction see Calvert to Hoare, 29 October 1935; Jeddah Report for October 1935; Calvert to Hoare, 5 November 1935; Calvert to Hoare, 19 November 1935; Jeddah Report, November 1935, Jeddah Report, January 1936; *British Documents on Foreign Affairs* (BDFA), part II, series B, vol. 11, pp. 107–88; TNA, HW 12/196, Buti to Jeddah, 28 September 1935; HW 12/197 Ibn Saud to Sulayman, 1 October 1935; Ibn Saud to Sulayman, 25 October 1935; HW 12/198, Hamza to Ibn Saud, 7 November 1935; Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, pp. 51–2.
106. AUSSME, H3, Racc. 5B, f. 1 'Fornitura governo saudiano', Suvich to War Ministry and Ministry for the Colonies, 9 January 1936.
107. Erlich, *Saudi Arabia and Ethiopia*, p. 56; ASMAE, Gab. b. 519, f. 2.
108. AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 17 E, f. 2 'Fornitura di armi al governo saudiano (febbraio 1937–novembre 1938)', Ciano to War Ministry, 17 May 1938; Captain Alfredo D'Auria to Army Chief of Staff, 27 June 1938.
109. Calvert to Hoare, 19 November 1935; Jedda Report for February 1936; Jedda Report for March 1936, *BDFA*, part II, series F, vol. 11, pp. 119–20, 193–8, 207–12; ASMAE, Gab. b. 519, f. 'Affari Politici, 1936–37', Foreign Ministry cabinet to Mussolini, 3 March 1936.
110. Shortly before the war started Saudi merchants shipped vegetables and fruit to Eritrea. However, owing to the lengthy delay that occurred at the port of Massawa before the goods could be unloaded, the cargo 'perished' and had to be thrown overboard, with the loss falling on the shoulders of the Saudi merchants, who were to receive payment upon the consignment

landing safely. Calvert to Hoare, 1 October 1935, *BDFA*, part II, series B, vol. 11, pp. 79–80.
111. TNA, CAB, 24/262, 'Possible Italian designs on Arabia as a result of Italy's success in Abyssinia', 9 May 1936.
112. Suvich to Persico and Dubbiosi, 11 April 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. III, pp. 691–2.
113. Alegi, *Ali sul deserto*, pp. 29–47; TNA, HW 12/196, King to Yusuf Yasin, 8 September 1935; HW 12/203, Persico to Rome, 21 April 1936; Persico to Rome, 18 April 1936.
114. Y. Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity 1930–1945* (London: Frank Cass, 1986), p. 181.
115. TNA, CAB, 24/262, Ryan to Eden, 13 May 1936; FO 141/772/2, 'Ibn Saud and Italian Ambitions in Arabia', 23 November 1936. Rendel assured the King that Italy was not likely to violate the 1927 Anglo-Italian Agreement regarding the *status quo* in the Red Sea.
116. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 4, f. 'Arabia'; Dubboisi to Suvich, 6 June 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, p. 353.
117. Jeddah Report for October 1935, 2 November 1935, *BDFA,* part II, series B, vol. 11, pp. 108–14.
118. Suvich to Dubbiosi, 13 April 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, p. 353.
119. Suvich to Dubbiosi, 6 July 1935; Dubbiosi to Mussolini, 13 August 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, pp. 527, 734.
120. Dubbiosi to Mussolini, 9 July 1935; Suvich to Dubbiosi, 16 July 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, pp. 537, 577.
121. Quartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen', p. 865.
122. TNA, HW 12/195, Mussolini to De Bono, 19 September 1935. In mid-October Gasparini conveyed to the Imam, through a Syrian notable who was invited to Sana'a, the uselessness of conducting a pro-Ethiopian policy. TNA, HW 12/196, Gasparini [Alexandria] to Foreign Ministry, 18 October 1835.
123. De Bono, *Anno XIIII*, pp. 31, 204–5. Despite the Imam's official policy of not permitting the enrolment of troops for service outside Yemen, Yemeni soldiers participated in the war in Ethiopia, fighting on the Italian side. TNA, FO 371/18910, 'Affairs of Aden Protectorate and Anglo-Yemeni relations subsequent to the signing of the treaty', 9 July 1935; A. Volterra, *Sudditi Coloniali: Ascari eritrei 1935–1941* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2005), pp. 92, 164.
124. De Bono, *Anno XIIII*, pp. 80–2, 104–5, 204–5.
125. Suvich to Dubbiosi, 21 October 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, p. 415.
126. TNA, CAB 24/262, 'Possible Italian designs on Arabia as a result of Italy's success in Abyssinia', 9 May 1936.
127. Dubbiosi to Mussolini, 21 October 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, p. 417; TNA, GFM 36/511, 'Yemen: Situazione politica nel 1935' [written by Dubbiosi].
128. B. Reilly [Aden] to Parkinson [CO], 23 October 1935; Courtney [Air Ministry] to Parkinson, 14 November 1935, *BDFA*, part II, series B, vol. 11, pp. 120–1.
129. Suvich to Dubbiosi, 26 October 1935; Suvich to Dubbiosi, 8 November 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 415, 563.
130. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 10, f. 13, note for Suvich, 16 January 1936; note for Suvich, 10 February 1936.
131. Central Zionist Archives (*CZA*), S100/17, Jewish Agency Executive meeting, 17 November 1935; Y. Eyal, *The First Intifada* (Tel Aviv: Marachot, 1998),

p. 53 [in Hebrew]; De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, p. 165; M. Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 84–5.
132. TNA, FO 141/659, 'Transmissions in Arabic', 21 November 1935.
133. Pinto, 'Between *imago* and *res*, pp. 99–100; ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 10, memorandum for Suvich, 4 November 1935.
134. De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, pp. 648–54.
135. Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews*, pp. 86–8; Memorandum, 2 February 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1212.
136. CZA, S100/18, Jewish Agency executive meeting, 8 March 1936.
137. TNA, FO 371/19983, 'Extract from a letter from Dr. Nahum Goldmann', 15 June 1936, attached to: Weizmann to Ormsby Gore, 19 July 1936.
138. TNA, FO 371/19983, 'Note of a conversation between the head of the Italian propaganda organization in Egypt and the Cairo representative of the Jewish Agency', 15 July 1936. For more on the idea of settling Jews in Ethiopia see S. I.Minerbi, 'Il progetto di un insediamento ebraico in Etiopia (1936–43)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 17, no. 6 (1986), pp. 1083–137.
139. M. Kabha, '"My Enemy's Enemy – A Friend": Attitudes of the National Palestinian Movement Towards Fascism and Nazism, 1925–1945', *Zmanim*, 67 (1999), p. 79 [in Hebrew].
140. This episode is discussed at length in *Oriente Moderno* XV (May 1935), pp. 198–201; Y. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab National Movement: from Riots to Rebellion, 1929–1939* (London: Frank Cass, 1977), pp. 65–6; Cleveland, *Islam Against the West*, pp. 147–8. The letter is commonly believed to have been forged.
141. *Filastin*, 17 July 1935, cited in *Oriente Moderno*, XV (August 1935), p. 393; *Filastin*, 9 August 1935, cited in *Oriente Moderno*, XV (September 1935), p. 445; *Filastin*, 7 September 1935, cited in *Oriente Moderno*, XV (October 1935), p. 522; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (November 1935), pp. 575, 586.
142. Kabha, *Journalism in the Eye of the Storm*, p. 150; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (August 1935), p. 445.
143. 'On the Mufti's visit to Syria', *Davar*, 1 September 1935; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (September 1935), pp. 511–12.
144. TNA, HW 12/197, Persico to Foreign Ministry, 24 October 1935; FO 371/19020, unsigned note, 10 December 1935.
145. Memorandum, 2 February 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1212.
146. Carpi, 'Weizmann's Political Activity in Italy', p. 185–93.
147. 'What is Abyssinia for England?' *Davar*, 9 September 1935; 'In the Thick of World Politics', *Davar*, 27 September 1935; 'The Balance of Power in the Mediterranean', *Davar*, 9 October 1935.
148. Letter from Judah L. Magnes, *Palestine Post*, 15 November 1935.
149. 'New Italy in War', *HaYarden*, 23 October 1935.
150. 'The Conflict in Abyssinia and the Jewish State', *HaYarden*, 8 November 1935. The names of the journalists who took part in the interview were not mentioned.
151. Z. Kulitz, *Mussolini: His Personality and Philosophy* (Tel Aviv: Tevel, 1936), pp. 48, 113 [in Hebrew].
152. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 198, f. 'Siria 1935'; f. 'Siria 1936', note for the Director General of the services for the foreign press, 24 September 1936.

153. TNA, GFM 36/509, Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio V, 'Siria: Situazione politica nel 1936'; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (October 1935), p. 515.
154. 'Report from Beirut', *Palestine Post*, 4 October 1935; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (October 1935), p. 516; P. S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: the Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920–1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1987), p. 455.
155. *Palestine Post*, 4 October 1935; TNA, HW 12/196, Rome to Consulate in Beirut, 6 October 1935.
156. TNA, GFM 36/507, Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio V, 'Irak: Situazione politica nel 1936'.
157. Canali, *Mussolini e il petrolio iracheno*, pp. 179–87.
158. Italian concerns over 'terrorist' or 'criminal' attacks against vessels passing through the Canal were a sort of leitmotif in the correspondence between Rome and Egypt. See, for example, Pagliano to Mussolini, 25 April 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. I, pp. 69–70; TNA, HW 12/194, Rome to Italian legation, 20 August 1935; HW 12/195, Ghigi to Foreign Ministry, 31 August 1935.

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1. J. C. Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2005), p. 69.
2. C. C. Röhl, *Wilhelm II: the Kaiser's Personal Monarchy, 1888–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 944.
3. 'Colloquio Hitler-Ciano', 24 October 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. V, pp. 315–20.
4. Pollard, *The Fascist Experience*, p. 98.
5. 17 March 1939; 20 March 1939; 21–3 May 1939, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, pp. 203, 205, 233.
6. G. Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, M. Muggeridge (ed.) (London: Odhams Press, 1948), pp. 60–1.
7. Earl of Avon, *The Eden Memoirs vol. I: Facing the Dictators*. (London: Cassell, 1962), pp. 421–2; C. Seton-Watson, 'The Anglo-Italian Gentleman's Agreement of January 1937 and its Aftermath', in W. F. Mommsen and L. Kettenacker (eds), *The Fascist Challenge and the Policy of Appeasement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), pp. 273–4.
8. 'Text of an Anglo-Italian Declaration with regard to the Mediterranean signed at Rome on January 2, 1937', *DBFP*, 2, vol. XVII, p. 754.
9. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, p. 20; Toscano, *The History of Treaties*, p. 30; G. B. Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano: una vita 1903/1944* (Milano: Bompiani, 1979), p. 285.
10. ASMAE, Gab. 743, 'Relazione di massima', 15 July 1936.
11. De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, pp. 19–20; C. Mutti, 'Mussolini e la Spada dell'Islam', *Centro Studi La Runa*, from http://www.centrostudilaruna.it/mussolinielaspadadellislam.html [viewed on 12 April 2007].
12. TNA, FO 371/20786, 'Italian press comments on the situation in the Middle East', 8 January 1937.
13. M. Guidi, 'Aspetti e problemi del mondo islamico', *Quaderni dell'istituto nazionale di cultura fascista*, serie settima, VII (Roma, 1937), p. 50; G. Selvi, 'Arabia in fermento', *Gerarchia*, XVII, no. 12 (1937), pp. 827–9.
14. E. Moleti di Sant'Andrea, *Mare Nostrum (Roma nella civiltà mediterranea)* (Milano: E.L.I.C.A, 1938), pp. 347–51.

15. De Felice, 'Arabi e Medio Oriente', p. 1260. In July 1937 Sciartini was in Beirut to read and provide commentary on Mussolini's *La dottrina del fascismo*. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 198, f. 'Siria 1937'.
16. G. Tucci, 'Il Fascismo e l'Islam', *La Vita Italiana* (maggio 1937), pp. 597–601.
17. C. Burdett, 'Mussolini's Journey to Libya (1937): Ritual, Power and Transculturation', in J. Andall and D. Duncan (eds), *National Belongings* (Peter Lang, forthcoming); M. Mehdi, 'The Rise of Islamism in the Light of European Totalitarianism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10, no. 1 (2009), pp. 4–5.
18. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 117.
19. Carretto, '<Sapere> e <potere>', p. 218, p. 218; Giro, 'L'Istituo per l'Oriente', p. 1153.
20. See, for example, ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 26 September 1936; AP, Etiopia – Fondo di Guerra, b. 166, Castellani to Foreign Ministry, 3 May 1938.
21. A. Stille, 'The Double Blind of Italian Jews: Acceptance and Assimilation', in J. D. Zimmerman (ed.), *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 26.
22. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, p. 335.
23. Mussolini to Grandi, 20 April 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. III, p. 715.
24. Bosworth, *Mussolini*, pp. 300, 317, 335.
25. Pinto, 'Between *imago* and *res*', p. 102.
26. TNA, CO 733/299/12, 'Bari Radio Broadcasts, 27 June 1936, 7:40 p.m.'
27. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, p. 20; Mallett, *The Italian Navy*, pp. 23–6; Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 288; Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dell'Aeronautica Militare (AUSAM), Aeroporti – Pratiche varie (1935), f. 'Aeroporto di Rodi'.
28. Minniti, *Fino alla Guerra*, pp. 141–3; Mallett, *The Italian Navy*, p. 72; L. A. Maltoni, 'Gli aeroporti del Dodecaneso', *Rivista Aeronautica*, 1 (2002), pp. 100–11; AUSAM, Aeronautica della Libia (1936), f. 'Basi aree della Libia'.
29. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, pp. 327, 361; AUSSME, H6, Racc. 14, f. 'P.R. 12: Direttive generali'; f. IV 'Teatro d'operazioni dell Africa Settentrionale'.
30. Minniti, *Fino alla Guerra*, pp. 145–8; 3 January 1938, 14 February 1938, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, pp. 44, 58. There is no mention in diplomatic sources nor in Mazzolini's diary of any actions he may have taken to prepare Italian nationals to carry out sabotage attacks in Egypt. The instructions he received might have changed following the Easter Accords. Mazzolini burnt the embassy's secret documents before leaving Cairo. G. S. Rossi, *Mussolini e il diplomatico. La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini, un monarchico a Salò* (Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli, 2005), p. 92.
31. Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics*, pp. 159, 190, 193.
32. TNA, HW 12/206, Rome to Jeddah, 20 July 1936. The available sources do not state whether such an offer was made or how al-Qargani responded. However, nothing in his conduct after this point suggests that he accepted the Italian offer.
33. Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia dell'amicizia*, p. 97; Alegi, *Ali sul deserto*, pp. 45–56.
34. Ciano to Sillitti, 14 April 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VI, p. 576.
35. TNA, FO 141/445/3, Bullard to Lampson, 12 April 1937; Bullard to Lampson, 14 April 1937.
36. See, for example, TNA, HW 12/218, 31 July 1937.

37. TNA, HW 12/215, Acting Japanese Minister in Cairo to Tokyo, 11 May 1937.
38. TNA, FO 141/676, 'Interview with H.M. King Abdul Aziz', 18 December 1937.
39. Sillitti to Ciano, 2 August 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 204–6.
40. Ciano to Sillitti, 31 August 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 312–13.
41. Sillitti to Ciano, 30 October 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, p. 588.
42. ASMAE, Gab. 744, Paveri to Foreign Ministry, 30 October 1937.
43. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 22, f. 2 'Armi', Ciano to Guarneri, 15 November 1937; Ciano to Guarneri, 1 December 1937.
44. ASMAE, Gab. 202, f. 'Fornitura armi alla Saudia', Ciano to Jeddah, 12 December 1937; Sillitti to Foreign Ministry, 18 December 1937; Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia dell'amicizia*, pp. 100–1.
45. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 22, f. 2 'Armi', unsigned note, 20 December 1937. At about the same time, the Italian Foreign Ministry learnt from a report published in *Il Messaggero* that the authorities in Italian East Africa had confiscated a large quantity of arms from the local population. Mussolini instructed the Ministry for Italian Africa to gather all these arms (about 4,000 firearms and over a million cartridges) in Eritrea for future use in Italy's 'secret activities' in Arabia and in Egypt. However, no use was found for these weapons and in spring 1940 Rome had no objection to Italian authorities in East Africa using them for their own needs. See ASMAE, Gab. 742, f. 'Accantonamento armi e munizioni catturate agli abissini 1938–1940', note for Ciano, 4 January 1938; Ciano to Teruzzi, 5 January 1938; Cavallero to Ministry for Italian Africa, 22 January 1938; Teruzzi to Ciano, 20 April 1940; Ciano to Teruzzi, 14 May 1940.
46. TNA, FO 141/676, 'Interview with H.M. King Abdul Aziz', 18 December 1937.
47. TNA, FO 371/21906, Bullard to Foreign Office, 6 March 1938; Bullard to Foreign Office, 11 March 1938; Bullard to Baxter, 14 June 1938; AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 17 E, f. 2, Ciano to Pariani, 31 December 1937; War Ministry Cabinet to Foreign Ministry, 4 March 1938.
48. AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 17 E, f. 2 'Fornitura di armi al governo saudiano (febbraio 1937–novembre 1938)'. As we shall see in Chapter 5, in 1939 Ibn Saud eventually purchased a large consignment of arms from Italy.
49. M. Wolffsohn, 'The German-Saudi Arabian Arms Deal of 1936–1939 Reconsidered', in U. Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919–1939* (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center, 1988), pp. 286–7.
50. TNA, FO 141/445/3, 'Record of conversation between Ibn Saud, Rendel and Bullard', Fourth interview, 22 March 1937; FO 141/676, Bullard to Foreign Office, 17 January 1938.
51. J. Kostiner, 'Britain and the Challenge of the Axis Powers in Arabia: The decline of British-Saudi cooperation in the 1930s', in M. J. Cohen and M. Kolinsky (eds), *Britain and the Middle East in the 1930s* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 137.
52. L. Luminari, 'Armi all'Irak: obiettivi e mezzi della politica fascista in Medio Oriente (1931–1941)', *Storia Contemporanea*, 26, no. 4 (1995), pp. 540–2.
53. Ibid., p. 543.
54. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico, 'Irak – Situazione politica nel 1937'.
55. ACS, Ministero Aeronautica, Gabinetto 1937, b. 70, f. 41/2 'Iraq – forniture'; f. 41/3 'Iraq – notiziario', 14–19 June 1937.

56. Clark Kerr to Eden, 19 June 1937; Eden to Clark Kerr, 24 June 1937, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, pp. 232–4.
57. Luminari, 'Armi all'Irak', pp. 547–8, 560. In May 1941 Gusa was one of the Italian airmen who was sent to Iraq to assist the forces loyal to the pro-Axis Prime Minister, Rashid Ali al-Kaylani, in their struggle against the British.
58. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: 'Irak – Situazione politica nel 1937'.
59. ACS, Ministero Aeronautica, Gabinetto 1937, b.70, f. 41/2 'Iraq – forniture'; Eden to Clark Kerr, 3 July 1937, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, pp. 324–25; Luminari, 'Armi all'Irak', pp. 548–52; J. Cole, 'Iraq in 1939: British alliance or nationalist neutrality towards the Axis?', in P. Y. Solanes (ed.), *Actes del congrés: Europa, 1939 – L'any de les catàstrofes* (Barcelona: CEFID, 2009), p. 9.
60. Lampson to Eden, 18 February 1937; Drummond to Eden, 15 March 1937, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, pp. 136–9, 141–2.
61. TNA, CAB 51/8, Paper no. 185, 'Note prepared by the Colonial Office regarding the Treaty Relations of HMG with the Rulers of Hadhramaut', [*c.* June] 1935.
62. Ciano to Grandi, 15 July 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 82–5.
63. Grandi to Ciano, 14 July 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 75–80.
64. Ciano to Grandi, 15 July 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 82–5.
65. Ciano to Dubbiosi, 15 July 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 81–2.
66. Ciano to Ghigi, 15 July 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, pp. 85–6.
67. *Oriente Moderno*, XVI (September 1936), p. 520. In April 1936 the Imam believed that Mussolini would be too preoccupied with the conquest of Ethiopia to renew negotiations with Yemen. He wrote a personal letter to the Duce, suggesting that the treaty of 1926 be prolonged. ACS, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Archivio Segreto 1906–1944, b. 10, f. 6, sf. 17, Iahya to Mussolini, 21 April 1936.
68. *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (October 1937), pp. 570–1.
69. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 12, f. 11 'SANE'; b. 16, f. 2 'Fornitura di armi allo Yemen'; *Radio Araba di Bari – Pubblicazione mensile della 'Radio Bari'*, vol. 1 (1938). I am greatly indebted to Mario Tedeschini Lalli for sharing this information with me.
70. Quartararo, 'L'Italia e lo Yemen', p. 871.
71. 'Extracts from Speech by Count Ciano', 13 May 1937, cited in S. Heald (ed.), *Documents on International Affairs 1937* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), p. 283.
72. Colonial authorities did not know exactly how many Muslims lived in Italian East Africa. According to some estimates, there were between 2.5 and 4.8 million Muslims in Ethiopia, whose total population was also debated. The Italians believed that more than half of Eritrea's approximately 600,000 inhabitants belonged to the Islamic faith. In Somalia, where the population numbered just over one million, the Muslims constituted the majority. ASMAE, Gab. 244 (b. 561), f. 'Rapporti sui musulmani di Etiopia inviati in Arabo dall'Emiro Chekib Arslan e tradotti dalla dott. Veccia Vaglieri', 28 February 1935; Istituto Coloniale Fascista, *Annuario delle colonie italiane 1936* (Roma: Castaldi, 1936), pp. 27, 391; A. Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo italiano*, p. 209; A. Nobile, 'Gli studi demografici sulle colonie italiane: fonti e problemi', *Fonti archivistiche e ricerca demografica: atti del convegno internazionale, Trieste, 23–26 aprile 1990* (Roma: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1996), p. 710.

73. A. Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941* (Lawrenceville: The Red Sea Press, 1997), pp. 163–90; ACS, Carte Graziani, scat. 28, f. 29, 'Il secondo anno dell'Impero', parte IV, p. 4; *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (November 1937), pp. 586–7; Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo italiano*, pp. 207–13; Borruso, *L'Ultimo Impero Cristiano*, pp. 195–6; B. Sullivan, 'The Italian–Ethiopian War, October 1935–November 1941: Causes, Conduct and Consequences', in E. J. Errington and A. Hamish Ion (eds), *Great Powers and Little Wars: the Limits of Power* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), pp. 187–8; Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni*, pp. 273–8.
74. Gooch, 'Re-conquest and Suppression', p. 1027.
75. Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo italiano*, pp. 207–13; Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni*, pp. 280–1.
76. A. Lessona, *Memorie* (Roma: Edizioni Lessona, 1963), pp. 300–1; TNA, HW 12/203, Rome to Tangiers and Aleppo, 14 May 1936; ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 14, f. 1, unsigned note, 28 May 1936.
77. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 22, f. 1 'Pellegrinaggio alla Mecca', Ciano to Jeddah, 9 February 1937; Jeddah to Rome, 27 March 1937.
78. R. Bullard, *Two Kings in Arabia: Letters from Jeddah 1923–5 and 1936–9* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993), p. 138; *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (May 1937), p. 218; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (May 1935), p. 222.
79. *Il Messagero*, 4 April 1937, cited in *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (May 1937), p. 218.
80. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 22, f. 1 'Pellegrinaggio alla Mecca', Foreign Ministry to Cairo, Baghdad, Jeddah, Jerusalem, Beirut, Damascus, Sana'a and Algiers, undated [April 1937].
81. TNA, FO 905/50, 'Relations: Italy–Saudi Arabia', translations of articles published in *Corriere Hararino* on 1 May 1937 and in *Corriere dell'Impero* on 17 September 1937; D. J. Grange, 'La propaganda arabe de Radio Bari (1937–1939)', *Relations internationales*, no. 5 (1976), p. 73; Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness*, p. 144.
82. *Palestine Post*, 9 March 1937, p. 1.
83. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, 'L'Italia ed i popoli Mussulmani', 12 June 1937.
84. *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (October 1937), p. 534.
85. *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (November 1937), pp. 540, 586.
86. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 30, Mazzolini to Foreign and Propaganda Ministries, 4 December 1936; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 170, f. 'Palestina 1937', note for Rocco, 6 April 1937. Mazzolini found it difficult to obtain authorization from the Foreign Ministry for this payment. In April 1937 the owner of the newspaper was still complaining that he had not been compensated.
87. *Oriente Moderno*, XV (August 1935), p. 370; Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni*, pp. 268–9; Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, p. 327. The creation of a college of Islamic culture in Libya was first discussed in 1914. The idea resurfaced in May 1935, when the Iranian Ambassador to Rome advised Mussolini to establish a University of Muslim Theology in Tripoli as a show of good faith towards the Muslim world. The Duce was impressed by the suggestion and instructed Balbo to establish such an institution. 2 May 1935, Aloisi, *Journal*, p. 269.
88. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, p. 331; TNA, FO 371/19075, 'Radio Bari, 14 September 1935'.

89. *Oriente Moderno*, XV (October 1935), p. 505; *Oriente Moderno*, XV (November 1935), pp. 562–3.
90. Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics*, p. 167; Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Palestina e Transgiordania; Situazione politica nell'anno XVIII (29 ottobre 1939–10 giugno 1940)'; A. Khaled, *Documents secrets du 2eme bureau: Tunisie – Maghreb dans le conjoncture de pré-guerre 1937–1940* (Tunis: Societe Tunisienne de diffusion, 1983), p. 216.
91. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 62, f. 'Egitto 1936'; b. 135, f. 'Irak 1938', Gabbrielli to Press and Propaganda Ministry, 7 April 1938; TNA, CO 733/299/12, 'Italian Propaganda'.
92. L. Goglia, 'Sulle organizzazioni fasciste indigene nelle colonie africane dell'Italia', in G. Di Febo and R. Moro (eds), *Fascismo e franchismo* (Rubbettino: Soveria Mannelli, 2005), pp. 185–94.
93. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 54, f. 1 'Stampa e trasmissioni radio'.
94. The Duce had visited Tripolitania before, in 1926.
95. *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (April 1937), p. 169; Goglia, 'Sulle organizzazioni fasciste indigene', p. 198; J. L. Wright, 'Mussolini, Libya, and the Sword of Islam', in R. B. Ghiat and M. Fuller (eds), *Italian Colonialism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 123–5; G. Ward Price, *I Know these Dictators* (London: Harrap, 1937), p. 247; G. L. Steer, *A Date in the Desert* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), p. 133.
96. Mussolini, *OO*, XXVIII, p. 146; 'Extracts from Speeches by Signor Mussolini in Libya', cited in *Documents on International Affairs 1937*, pp. 268–69; *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (April 1937), p. 169.
97. Burdett, *Journeys through Fascism*, p. 45.
98. Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B1059, 1060 1061 and 1062, 17 March 1937; *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, 28 March 1937.
99. From the French version of Napoleon's proclamation to the people of Egypt, June 1798, cited in Herold, *Bonaparte in Egypt*, p. 69.
100. Kaiser Wilhelm II, speech of 8 November 1898 in Damascus, cited in Röhl, *Wilhelm II*, p. 953.
101. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 116; F. Cataluccio, *Storia del Nazionalismo Arabo* (Milano: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1939), p. 318; *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (April 1937), p. 169.
102. TNA, HW 12/214, Rome to Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Jerusalem, Cairo and Jeddah, 24 March 1937; Rome to Tangier, 27 March 1937; Sillitti to Foreign Ministry, 29 March 1937.
103. ASMAE, Gab. 742, 'Viaggio del Duce in Libia per l'inaugurazione della littoranea anno XV: La politica islamica dell'Italia – Orientamenti e note ad uso dei giornalisti', 31 March 1937. The hype surrounding Mussolini's Libyan journey was marred by the untimely news of an Italian defeat in Spain.
104. 'Extracts from Statement by Signor Lessona', 19 May 1937, in *Documents on International Affairs 1937*, pp. 285–6.
105. 1 December 1937, in Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 31. Ciano, rather unfairly, noted in his diary that the film showed the 'spectacle of Arabs being scientifically massacred by our troops'.
106. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry cabinet, 27 May 1937.

107. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, Ciano to Mazzolini, 29 October 1937; Undersecretary of State for the Colonies to Foreign Ministry, 23 December 1937.
108. The sheer growth in the size of the files containing the correspondence between representatives in the Middle East and the Propaganda Ministry in Rome from 1934 to 1938 illustrates the growing significance of the ministry as well as the increased importance attached to propaganda in the region. See for comparison: ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, bb. 61, 62, 135, 198 & 199.
109. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 198, f. 'Siria 1936', Alfieri to Damascus, Beirut and Aleppo, 25 June 1936.
110. Virginia Vacca, '"Ar-Radyo": Le radio arabe d'Europa e d'Oriente e le loro pubblicazioni', *Oriente Moderno*, XX (September 1940), p. 445.
111. TNA, FO 395/558, 'Report on Arabic Broadcasting in Egypt and Palestine,' written by J. Heyworth-Dunne, 20 January 1938; MacDonald, 'Radio Bari', p. 196.
112. ACS, Ministero Cultura Popolare, Reports, b. 6, f. 57, Report on the journey in the Near East of Dr Enrico Nuné, 9 November 1937.
113. *Radio Araba di Bari*: *Pubblicazione mensile della 'Radio Bari'*, vol. 1 (1938); M. Shemesh, '*Filastin's* Position vis-a-vis the Axis and European States, 1938–1939', *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel*, 2 (1992), p. 276 [in Hebrew].
114. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 22, f. 3 'Stampa', British Embassy to Italian Foreign Ministry, 24 April 1937; Ministry for the Colonies to Foreign Ministry, 22 May 1937.
115. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 54, Extracts from Bari broadcasts, 13 December 1937 and 10 January 1938; IOR, L/PS/12/3997/31/12, 'Anti-British propaganda by Italy', Radio Bari Transmissions in Arabic communicated by Alexandria City Police, 14 and 19 April 1937; St John Philby, 'British bombs over Arabia', *World Review*, IV, no. 5 (January 1938), pp. 22–7.
116. Lampson to Eden, 17 December 1936, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, pp. 111–13.
117. For Britain's unsuccessful attempts to have Bari's propaganda toned down through diplomacy see: TNA, FO 371/19983, Foreign Office to Drummond, 18 December 1936; FO 371/21159, 'Anti-British Activities and Propaganda in the Middle East', 16 March and 27 April [1937]; MacDonald, 'Radio Bari', p. 199; Seton-Watson, 'Anglo-Italian Gentleman's Agreement', p. 269.
118. TNA, FO 371/21159, Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 13 July 1937.
119. MacDonald, 'Radio Bari', pp. 201–2; A. Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 400.
120. 24 January 1938, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 50.
121. TNA, FO 395/558, clipping from *New York World Telegram*, 4 January 1938. The file contains clippings from various other newspapers.
122. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 28, Italian Consulate in Jerusalem, press review no. 4, 13 January 1938.
123. TNA, FO 371/20941, minute by Cavendish Bentinck, 13 January 1938; Eden to H.M. Consul in Jibuti, 20 January 1938.
124. TNA, FO 371/20786, 'Italian anti-British propaganda in the Middle East and possibility of retaliatory action', 19 November 1937.

125. Ciano to Italian representatives in Arab and Muslim countries, 6 October 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. V, p. 176.
126. ASMAE, Gab. 743, Caruso to Ciano, 7 April 1937; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 170, f. 'Palestina 1937', Mazzolini to Ministry of Popular Culture, 10 November 1937; note for Mussolini, 24 November 1937.
127. TNA, FO 395/560, 'BBC: Overseas Intelligence Department'; FO 395/561, 'The British Broadcasting Corporation: The Arabic Broadcasts', September 1938.
128. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 22, f. 1 'Pellegrinaggio alla Mecca', Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry Cabinet, 30 March 1937.
129. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 199, f. 'Siria 1937', Vice-Consul in Alexadretta to Foreign Ministry and Press and Propaganda Ministry, 15 May 1937.
130. 'Extracts from Speech by Count Ciano', 13 May 1937, in *Documents on International Affairs 1937*, p. 283. For negative responses to the presentation of Mussolini as the 'protector of Islam' see for instance: 'Note by Sir R. Bullard respecting King Ibn Saud and the Italians', 29 July 1937, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, p. 279.
131. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry Cabinet, 27 May 1937; Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry, 3 June 1937.
132. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 18 June 1937; note for Ciano, 23 July 1937.
133. TNA, FO 141/676, 'Interview with H.M. King Abdul Aziz', 18 December 1937.
134. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 198, f. 'Siria 1936'; b. 199, f. 'Siria 1937'.
135. Clark Kerr to Eden, 27 March 1937, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, p. 229.
136. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 170, f. 'Palestina 1937', note for Rocco, 6 April 1937; Mazzolini to Ministry of Press and Propaganda, 30 April 1937.
137. TNA, AIR 2/1813, A.I. 16169, 'The Italians and Palestine', [June] 1937.
138. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 170, f. 'Palestina 1937', Mazzolini to Ministry of Press and Propaganda, 31 May 1937; TNA, AIR 2/1813, A.I. 16169, 'The Italians and Palestine'.
139. ASMAE, AP, Etiopia – Fondo di Guerra, b. 154, f. 12, Mazzolini to Press and Propaganda Ministry, 7 May 1937.
140. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry, 10 June 1937.
141. *Filastin*, 7 November 1936, cited in Kabha, *Journalism in the Eye of the Storm*, p. 186.
142. Shemesh, '*Filastin's* Position', pp. 267–8.
143. In March 1937 Mazzolini asked the Press and Propaganda Ministry to 'facilitate' the planned visit in Italy of *Filastin*'s owner, Isa al-Isa. ASMAE, Ufficio Stampa Estera – Ministero Cultura Popolare (1920–1944), b. 223, Mazzolini to Press and Propaganda Ministry, 16 March 1937. For more on the transformation in *Filastin*'s position see: N. Arielli, 'La politica dell'Italia fascista nei confronti degli arabi palestinesi, 1935–40', *Mondo Contemporaneo*, 2, no. 1 (2006), pp. 20–1.
144. Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, p. 244; *Oriente Moderno*, XVII (April 1937), p. 170; Wright, 'Mussolini, Libya', p. 126.

145. Monroe, *The Mediterranean in Politics*, p. 168.
146. Gershoni, *Egypt and Fascism*, pp. 234–5.
147. Ibid., p. 275; ASMAE, AP, Egitto, b. 16, f. 2, Ghigi to Foreign Ministry, 3 July 1936; Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels*, p. 24.
148. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 198, f. 'Partito Popolare Siriano', note by Nuné, undated; Buti to Ministry of Press and Propaganda, 24 July 1936; Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria*, p. 62.
149. Lampson to Eden, 17 December 1936, *BDFA*, series B, vol. 12, pp. 111–13.
150. Z. Elpeleg, *The Grand Mufti* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), p. 64.

4 Italy and the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–9

This chapter is an extension of the article: N. Arielli, 'Italian Involvement in the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–39', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35, no. 2 (2008), pp. 187–204.

1. Porath, *The Palestinian Arab*, pp. 140, 159–60; Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, pp. 49–54.
2. ASMAE, Gab. 743, memorandum, 2 February 1936.
3. Mackensen to Foreign Ministry, 10 September 1940, *DGFP*, series D, vol. XI, p. 48.
4. ASMAE, Gab. 743, memorandum, 2 February 1936; Suvich to Mussolini, 5 February 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. III, p. 223; De Angelis to Ciano, 9 July 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1213. No reason was given for the reduction of the original sum approved by Mussolini.
5. ASMAE, Gab. 743, Note for Ciano, 9 July 1936; note for Ciano, 22 July 1936. The editors of *La Nation Arabe* – Ihsan Jabiri and Shakib Arslan – also urged Mussolini and Ciano not to abandon the Arab cause and informed them of the heavy costs of maintaining the general strike in Palestine.
6. ASMAE, Gab. 743, handwritten summary signed by De Angelis, 25 July 1936.
7. TNA, AIR 2/1813, A.I.1 report no. 14225, 11 November 1936.
8. The secret affairs section of the cabinet to Mussolini, 3 September 1935; the secret affairs section of the cabinet to Mussolini, 17 October 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, pp. 23–5, 364–5.
9. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note, 26 September 1936; note for Ciano, 13 October XIV [1936]; note for Ciano, 4 November XV [1936].
10. ASMAE, Gab. 743, 'Relazione relativa alla missione compiuta in Palestina', 3 January 1937.
11. Foreign Ministry Cabinet to Ciano, 8 August 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, p. 235.
12. 'Incontro con Aumi Abdul Chadri Bey [*sic*] – 3, 4, 5 agosto 1937', in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', pp. 1235–6; Cleveland, *Islam against the West*, pp 87–9. The story of the embezzlement found its way into the French press. In the autumn of 1938, *Marianne* published a report written by its Jerusalem correspondent, André Parlet, who had interviewed the Mufti a year earlier. According to the report, Rome sent the Mufti £60,000, but an 'intermediary deemed it advisable to retain half of the sum. The Mufti complained to Rome, and a "young man from Italy connected with the transaction had to abandon every hope of making a brilliant career and

depart to a lost town in Central America".' See J. B. Schechtman, *The Mufti and the Fuehrer* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965), p. 82. The last sentence probably refers to De Angelis who was restationed in South America in September 1936.

13. G. Furlonge, *Palestine is My Country: The Story of Musa Alami* (London: John Murray, 1969), p. 100.
14. M. Sharett, *Political Dairy 1936* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976), p. 177 [in Hebrew]. Ben-Gurion gives a slightly different account of this conversation: D. Ben-Gurion, *Talks with Arab Leaders* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), p. 98 [in Hebrew].
15. ASMAE, Gab. 743, unsigned note, 10 September 1936; unsigned note, 26 September 1936; unsigned note, 28 September 1936. De Angelis helped to set up the meeting.
16. The story of Alami's contacts with Fascist Italy during the 1930's is nowhere to be found in his biography, written by G. Furlonge.
17. Note, 10 September 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1221; ASMAE, Gab. 743, 'Distrazione di fondi già inviati in Palestina', 21 November 1936; Ben-Gurion, *Talks with Arab Leaders*, p. 44.
18. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 22, 'Pretesi agenti italiani', 17 May 1937. The Italian Consul in Beirut also had no idea of the mechanism that had been set up, despite the fact that much of the correspondence went through Lebanon. See ASMAE, Gab. 744, Sbrana to Anfuso, 10 November 1937.
19. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 21 November 1936.
20. For this letter and others see ASMAE, Gab. 743 as well as Gab. 744.
21. Alami asked to meet Caruso on 20 March 1937 in the Italian hospice in Tiberius. 'Relazione relativa alla missione compiuta ad Atene', 20 January 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1225. The meeting was later canceled.
22. ASMAE, Gab. 744, Memorandum, 24 September 1937.
23. Furlonge, *Palestine is My Country*, pp. 112–13.
24. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 17 November 1937; note for Ciano, 28 November 1937.
25. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 31 December 1937; note on agreement reached between Caruso, Castellani and Darwish for the delivery in Syria of packages destined for the Mufti, 19 January 1938.
26. The intelligence service of the right-wing Jewish *Irgun* ('Etzel') seems to have been even more confused. The organization's information on Italian activity came from a dubious source in Haifa. See, for example, 'The people who took part in Italian activity during 1937' and 'The Italian activity during 1938', both in the Jabotinsky Institute Archives, Etzel collection, Kaf-4, 2/6/31.
27. TNA, FO 371/20820, Mackereth to Eden, 10 November 1937; FO 371/19983, Drummond to Foreign Office, 17 December 1936.
28. The main source for this table is 'Riassunto versamenti fatti e da farsi al mufti di Gerusalemme dal settembre 1936-XIV' in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', pp. 1244–5.
29. Eyal, *The First Intifada*, p. 126.
30. CZA, S25/22836, intercepted phone conversation, 11 September 1936. The Palestinian lira and the pound Sterling were equivalent. Nashashibi's

statement should be treated with caution because of his long-standing rivalry with Husayni.

31. Mackensen to Foreign Ministry, 10 September 1940, *DGFP*, series D, vol. XI, pp. 48–9. If Ciano was not exaggerating, the figure of 'millions' would have to refer to Italian lire.
32. The secret affairs section of the cabinet to Mussolini, 3 September 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, p. 23.
33. The secret affairs section of the cabinet to Mussolini, 17 October 1935, *DDI*, 8, vol. II, p. 365.
34. ASMAE, Gab. 743, memorandum, 2 February 1936.
35. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 9 July 1936.
36. Note, 10 September 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1220.
37. ASMAE, Gab. 743, Ciano to Baistrocchi, 14 September 1936; note for Mussolini, 26 September 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1222.
38. ASMAE, Gab. 244, Mussolini to representatives in Brussels, Prague, Bern & Copenhagen, 3 April 1935; note regarding Belgium, 15 May 1935.
39. ASMAE, Gab. 743, Pariani to Ciano, 28 November 1936.
40. AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 2, 'Verbali di armi belghe in Palestina tramite l'Italia (1936–1937–1938)', War Ministry Cabinet to Director General of Engineer Corps, November 1936.
41. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 21 November 1936; note for Ciano, 18 December 1936; 'Relazione relativa alla missione compiuta in Palestina', 3 January 1937; note for Ciano, 1 January 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1223. Berionni's coded telegram cancelling the operation was sent from Damascus on 18 December 1936. See: AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 2, 'Verbali di armi belghe in Palestina tramite l'Italia (1936–1937–1938)'.
42. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 25 January 1937. Ciano's comment is in handwriting on the top left corner of the document.
43. ASMAE, Gab. 743, Caruso to Ciano, 7 April 1937.
44. ASMAE, Gab. 743, unsigned note, 14 April 1937.
45. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 23 April 1937.
46. AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 17 E, f. 2 'Fornitura di armi al governo saudiano (febbraio 1937–novembre 1938)'; Racc. 2, Meeting with Caruso, 26 May 1937.
47. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 18 July 1937; note for Ciano, 28 July 1937.
48. ASMAE, Gab. 744, Paveri to Foreign Ministry, 30 October 1937; Ciano to Paveri, 1 November 1937; note for Ciano, 17 November 1937. Ciano wrote a large 'no' on this paragraph.
49. ASMAE, Gab. 202, f. 'Fornitura armi alla Saudia', Sillitti to Foreign Ministry, 18 December 1937.
50. ASMAE, Gab. 744, Ciano to War Ministry, 31 May 1938.
51. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 23 November 1936.
52. Haganah Archives, divisions 8, file 39, p. 181, 'Routes for smuggling arms', 25 July 1936; TNA, FO 141/445/3, Trott (Jeddah) to Kelly, 18 September 1937; Y. Gelber, *Growing a Fleur-de-Lis: The Intelligence Services of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine* (Tel Aviv: Defense Ministry, 1992), p. 273 [in Hebrew]; J. Markovizky, 'Italy's Involvement in the Arab Revolt', *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel*, vol. 9 (1999), p. 63 [in Hebrew]. The arms discovered in the Bay of Aqaba did not come from Italy.

53. Note, 10 September 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1220.
54. Note for Mussolini, 26 September 1936 in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1222. 'Approvato dal Duce' is written on the top left corner of this document which also bears Mussolini's 'M'.
55. ASMAE, Gab. 743, f. 'personali Libico da inviare in Palestina', Ministry for the Colonies to Balbo, 29 September 1936, unsigned note, 5 October 1936. It is not clear whether the 'operation' refers to the sabotaging of pipelines or the poisoning of waterways or both. This omission might not be accidental.
56. ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, Udienze, b. 3126.
57. ASMAE, Gab. 743, f. 'personali Libico da inviare in Palestina', Balbo to Ciano, 29 October 1936; Ciano to Balbo, 4 November 1936; Balbo to Ciano, 12 November 1936. Captain Kalifa Khalid was somewhat of an anomaly, since Libyans were usually not allowed to hold an officer's rank.
58. Note for Ciano, 18 July 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1234. Alami told the Italians that the Mufti wished to 'supply and develop' a Kurdish revolt, but did not elaborate.
59. ASMAE, Gab. 743, f. 'Oleodotto di Kirkuk', Cavagnari to Ciano, 27 April 1937; Foreign Ministry to London, Paris, Baghdad, Jerusalem & Beirut, 2 May 1937.
60. ASMAE, Gab. 744, memorandum, 24 September 1937.
61. Unsigned memorandum, 16 April 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. VI, p. 262.
62. AUSSME, H3, Car. SIM, Racc. 4, 'Offerte varie alla Grecia, agosto 1935 – marzo 1936'. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Brian Sullivan for this information.
63. The secret affairs section of the cabinet to Mussolini, 15 January 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. III, p. 81; ASMAE, Gab. 743, unsigned note, 16 September 1936.
64. *Parliamentary Debates*, fifth series, volume 311, House of Commons, Deb. 5, 6 May 1936, p. 1685. The secretary replied he 'had no information' on the subject.
65. *Palestine Post*, 7 May 1936.
66. *Oriente Moderno*, XVI (June 1936), p. 329.
67. ASMAE, Gab. 743, unsigned note, 6 September 1936.
68. A few months later, in April 1937, the Jewish Agency notified the Amir Abdullah of a report they had received, according to which the Mufti had used the pilgrimage to Mecca to 'undermine the position of the Amir'. According to the same report, King Ibn Saud was 'not enthusiastic about the plan and answered to his guests that he does not intend to invest efforts and money in a plan whose execution is doubtful'. CZA, S25/22836, Political Department to Amirate Palace, 4 April 1937.
69. Note, 10 September 1936; note for Mussolini, 26 September 1936, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', pp. 1220–2.
70. Note for Ciano, 1 January 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1223.
71. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Mussolini, 26 September 1936.
72. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 1 January 1937.
73. ASMAE, Gab. 744, 'Rapporto Peel – conclusioni', [July] 1937.
74. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, unsigned note, 26 July 1937.
75. Ciano to Mazzolini, 28 August 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. XI, p. 310.
76. ASMAE, Gab. 744, Bova Scoppa to Foreign Ministry, 31 July 1937; Bova Scoppa to Foreign Ministry, 11 August 1937; Bova Scoppa to Foreign

Ministry, 14 August 1937. For Mussolini's approval for Jamal Husayni's visit, see the minutes on a note for Ciano, 28 July 1937.

77. Note for Ciano, 28 July 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1228.
78. Note for Mussolini, 22 September 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', pp. 1238–9; ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Mussolini, 23 September 1937. The Amir Abdullah was pro-British and supported the partition plan, from which he stood to gain.
79. 'Nota n. 14 dell'Informazione Diplomatica', 16 February 1938; Ciano to Sillitti, 8 March 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 190, 321. The Arab press in Palestine made note of this. *Filastin* stated, 'Italy does not agree to the founding of a Jewish state in Palestine and recognizes only the Arab nation as the rightful owner'. See Shemesh, '*Filastin's* Position', p. 268.
80. 15 February 1938, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 58.
81. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 120. See also the entry of 4 September (p. 122) and Minerbi, 'Il progetto di un insediamento ebraico', pp. 1102–5.
82. 'List of Subjects for the Agenda of Anglo-Italian Conversations', *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, p. 330.
83. Director General for Europe and the Mediterranean to Ciano, 15 March 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, p. 372; Strang, *On the Fiery March*, p. 153.
84. Palestine (Verbal Assurances), 16 April 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, p. 577.
85. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for the Duce, 29 June 1938; note for Ciano, 4 July 1938. See the handwritten comments on both documents.
86. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 2 June 1938.
87. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 26 January 1938 [should be 1939, N.A.]; note for Ciano, 13 March 1939.
88. TNA, CO 733/299/12, 'Radio Bari Broadcast, 7.40 p.m. 27/6 [1936]'. Three days later Bari reported that 'the Mandatory Power in Palestine is very much afraid of Trans-Jordan whose Arabs have decided to cooperate in the holy war'.
89. TNA, CO 733/299/12, Hallett to Peel, 24 September 1936.
90. *Oriente Moderno*, XVI (November 1937), pp. 540, 586.
91. *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 25 October 1937.
92. TNA, FO 371/20819, Embassy in Rome to Foreign Office, 5 November 1937; Report from Jerusalem, 2 November 1937; 'Summary of Broadcasts from Bari-Rome', 19 October 1937; 'Summary of Broadcasts from Bari-Rome', 20 October 1937.
93. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 54, f. 1 'Stampa e trasmissioni radio'.
94. 26 October 1937, M. Sharett, *Political Diary 1937* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1971), p. 394 [in Hebrew].
95. Grandi to Ciano, 7 July 1937, *DDI*, 8, vol. VII, p. 35; note for Ciano, 18 July 1937, in Goglia, 'Il Mufti e Mussolini', p. 1229.
96. TNA, GFM 36/82, Report 75, Mazzolini to Ministry of Popular Culture, 30 May 1939.
97. CZA, S25/22741, CID weekly summary of intelligence, 11 September 1936.
98. D. Yisraeli, *The Palestine Problem in German Politics 1889–1945* (Bar Ilan University, 1974), p. 198 [in Hebrew].
99. A British intelligence report states that the 'Jerusalem agitator' Khalid al-Jarrah confessed in a private conversation that he had helped persuade the shop owner, Hasan al-Mutawali, to hang the picture of Mussolini. The

shop owner admitted having received a 'small gift' from the Italians for doing so. TNA, AIR 2/1813, A I, 17 June 1937. There is no mention of this in Italian documents.

100. ASMAE, AP 1931–1945, Palestina, b. 15, Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry, 21 May 1937; Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry, 27 May 1937.
101. TNA, FO 371/21159, Drummond to Eden, 28 May 1937. CO 733/431/15, Wauchope to Ormsby Gore, 23 August 1937.
102. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 15, Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry, 10 June 1937; TNA, GFM 36/508, Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio V, 'Palestina e Transgiordania: Situazione politica nel 1937'; Shemesh, '*Filastin's* Position', pp. 259–76.
103. ASMAE, Gab. 744, Bova Scoppa (Geneva) to Foreign Ministry, 31 July 1937; Bandak to Mussolini, 8 January 1939.
104. T. Segev, *Palestine under the British* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1999), p. 334 [in Hebrew]. Sakakini was most probably unaware of the secret contacts between the Mufti and the Italians.
105. G. Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), p. 405.
106. *Filastin*, 7 January 1938, cited in Shemesh, '*Filastin's* Position', p. 274.
107. Erlich, 'Periphery and Youth', pp. 410–20.
108. De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, p. 151; De Felice, 'Arabi e Medio Oriente', p. 1257; De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, pp. 21–2; De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, vol. II, p. 397.
109. De Felice, 'Arabi e Medio Oriente', p. 1261.
110. R. Lamb, *Mussolini and the British* (London: John Murray, 1996), pp. 214–15.
111. Y. Arnon-Ochana, 'Social and Political Aspects in the Arab Rebels' Movement, 1936–1939' in E. Danin (ed.), *Documents and Portraits from the Arab Gangs Archives* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), p. 26 [in Hebrew].
112. F. R. Nicosia, 'Fritz Grobba and the Middle East Policy of the Third Reich', in E. Ingram (ed.), *National and International Politics in the Middle East: Essays in Honor of Elie Kedourie* (London: Frank Cass, 1986), p. 218.
113. ASMAE, Gab. 743, note for Ciano, 9 July 1936.

5 Unattractive Policies, April 1938–May 1940

1. TNA, GFM 36/5, 'Relazione per il Gran Consiglio', 4 February 1939.
2. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 216.
3. Some high-ranking Fascists believed that the agreement elevated Italy's position in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea to that held by Britain. A. Lessona, *Un Ministro di Mussolini Racconta* (Milano: Edizioni Nazionali, 1973), p. 117.
4. Sillitti to Ciano, 4 March 1938; Imam Yahya to Mussolini, 10 March 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 307, 337.
5. 'Memorandum on the Negotiations at Rome for an Anglo-Italian Agreement, March 8–April 16, 1938' (hereafter: Memorandum on the Negotiations at Rome), *DBFP*, 2, vol. XIX, pp. 1109–10; G. Rendel, *The Sword and the Olive: Recollections of Diplomacy and the Foreign Service, 1913–1954* (London: John Murray, 1957), pp. 131–5.
6. 'Allegato 3: Accordo italo-britannico relativo ad alcune zone del Medio Oriente', 16 April 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 569–71.

7. TNA, FO 371/19978, 'Extracts from Commander-in-Chief, East Indies', Submission no. 915, 29 June 1936; Admiralty report, 'Red Sea Islands – international status', December 1936.
8. The Director General of European and Mediterranean Affairs to Ciano, 31 March 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, p. 497.
9. 'Accordo italo-britannico relativo ad alcune zone del Medio Oriente', 16 April 1938; Ciano to Perth, 16 April 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 570, 574.
10. Leatherdale, *Britain and Saudi Arabia*, p. 137; IOR, L/PS/12/2114/6/47, Governor of Aden to Colonial Office, 22 March 1939.
11. 'Memorandum on the Negotiations at Rome', *op. cit.*, p. 1101; Ciano to Perth, 16 April 1936, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, p. 575.
12. 'Memorandum on the Negotiations at Rome', *op. cit.*, pp. 1108–9.
13. Mussolini, *OO*, vol. XXVIII, pp. 67–72.
14. Ibid., pp. 102–3.
15. Office III of the Director General for the General Affairs of Europe and the Mediterranean to Ciano, 21 March 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 436–7. Note De Peppo's summary of Ciano's comment.
16. 'Memorandum on the Negotiations at Rome', *op. cit.*, pp. 1119–21.
17. 23 February 1939, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 193.
18. Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B1451, 'Egitto – il canale di Suez', 25 January 1939.
19. Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, p. 65.
20. Eyal, *The First Intifada*, pp. 393, 417–20.
21. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, pp. 434–6; F. Minniti, *Fino alla Guerra*, pp. 169–72; Mallett, *The Italian Navy*, p. 120.
22. Hungarian National Archives (HNA), Foreign Ministry Archive, K 100, N.671/443, 'Conversation with the Duce on 10 September, 1938'. I am greatly indebted to Prof. John Gooch for sharing this material with me.
23. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 157.
24. W. I. Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy: The Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy, 1920–1940* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1988), pp. 226–33,239; Pasqualini, *Gli equilibri nel Levante*, p. 296.
25. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, pp. 162, 167.
26. François-Poncet to Bonnet, 26 March 1939, *DDF*, 2, vol. XIV, pp. 224–5.
27. Steer, *A Date in the Desert*, p. 31.
28. 8 January, 3 February, 19 February; 25–6 April and 12 May 1939, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, pp. 175, 184–5, 190, 223, 230; Strang, *On the Fiery March*, p. 211; Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, p. 104.
29. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Iraq – Situazione politica nell'anno XVII'; 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Regno Arabo-Saudiano – Situazione politica nel 1938'; *Oriente Moderno*, XVIII (December 1938), pp. 648, 679. Yemen had already recognized Italy's conquest of Ethiopia in the 1937 Treaty of Friendship. Kolinsky, *Britain's War in the Middle East*, p. 20.
30. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 12, f. 3 'Dossier abissino Luoghi Santi', Ministry for the Colonies to Foreign Ministry, 16 July 1936. The ownership of the convent is disputed even today.
31. Borruso, *L'Ultimo Impero Cristiano*, pp. 233–41.

32. Office III of the Director General for the General Affairs of Europe and the Mediterranean to Ciano, 15 March 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 372–4.
33. Borruso, *L'Ultimo Impero Cristiano*, pp. 233–41.
34. A. Cassels, 'Reluctant Neutral: Italy and the Strategic Balance in 1939', in B. J. C. McKercher and R. Legault (eds), *Military Planning and the Origins of the Second World War in Europe* (Westport and London: Praeger, 2001), p. 38.
35. 6 September 1938, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 123; Sbacchi, *Legacy of Bitterness*, p. 192.
36. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 443.
37. Ibid., pp. 399, 407, 445, 475.
38. ASMAE, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Affari Politici (1937–42), El. III, Cart. 59, f. 61, Balbo to Ministry for Italian Africa and SIM, 22 November 1937; 'Notizie sull'attività politico-militare nelle colonie francese confinanti', 22 November 1937.
39. AUSSME, G28, Rac. 59, f. 'Comando del XX Corpo d'Armata: Relazione esercitazioni anno XVI'; f. 'Esercitazioni anno XVI in Libia'.
40. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 451.
41. B. Sullivan, 'The Path Marked Out by History: The German-Italian Alliance, 1939–1943', in J. R. Adelman (ed.), *Hitler and his Allies in World War II* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 117–24.
42. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 487.
43. A. Biagini and F. Frattolillo (eds), *Verbali delle riunioni tenute dal Capo di S. M. Generale*, vol. I (Roma: Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, 1983), pp. 17–19.
44. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 54, f. 1 'Stampa e trasmissioni radio', Sillitti to Foreign Ministry, 18 October 1938; Sillitti to Foreign Ministry, 15 November 1938.
45. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico, Regno Arabo-Saudiano – Situazione politica nel 1938'; Sbacchi, *Il colonialismo italiano*, pp. 210–15.
46. Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity*, p. 84; Borruso, *L'Ultimo Impero Cristiano*, p. 229; clipping from *Al-Ahram* of 26 January 1940 in ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, DGSP, b. 63, Egitto, f. 'Cairo'.
47. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, pp. 311–16; Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B1361, 24 August 1938; D. Alfieri, *Dictators Face to Face* (London: Elek, 1954), pp. 52–3.
48. Alfieri, *Dictators Face to Face*, p. 51.
49. Marongiu Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni*, pp. 286–7.
50. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 147; Goglia, 'Sulle organizzazioni fasciste indigene', p. 199.
51. R. Griffin (ed.), *Fascism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 74–5.
52. L. Goglia, 'Note sul razzismo coloniale fascista', *Storia Contemporanea*, 19, no. 6 (1988), pp. 1238–9.
53. 'Nota n. 18 dell'informazione diplomatica', 5 August 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. IX, pp. 508–9.
54. R. Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922–1945* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2004), p. 129; Goglia, 'Note sul razzismo coloniale fascista', p. 1239; Burdett, *Journeys through Fascism*, p. 131.
55. 3 January 1933, Aloisi, *Journal*, p. 46.

56. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 116.
57. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, pp. 323–5.
58. Steer, *A Date in the Desert*, p. 165.
59. *Oriente Moderno*, XIX (June 1939), p. 340.
60. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, pp. 321–3.
61. For hints of Roman influences on Balbo's approach see: Goglia, 'La politica indigena di Balbo', p. 299.
62. Goglia, 'Note sul razzismo coloniale fascista', pp. 1258, 1264.
63. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, pp. 329–30; Goglia, 'Sulle organizzazioni fasciste indigene', p. 200.
64. Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B1505; B1506; B1507, 3 May 1939.
65. *Oriente Moderno*, XIX (June 1939), p. 339.
66. Segrè, *Italo Balbo*, pp. 325–6; Archivio Luce, Cinegiornali, B1505, 'Fiorita: Primo villaggio agricolo mussulmano', 3 May 1939; *Oriente Moderno*, XIX (June 1939), p. 339; Segré, *Fourth Shore*, pp. 145, 149. The Italians also wanted to keep the Libyans in the countryside to prevent the emergence of a disgruntled class of poor or unemployed urban natives.
67. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 54, note by Nunè for the Head of Division II, 23 December 1938; ACS, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Archivio Segreto 1906–44, b. 23, f. 13, sf. 1.2 'Propaganda araba antitaliana', Ministry for Italian Africa to Tripoli, 10 March 1939; Foreign Ministry to Ministry for Italian Africa, 20 April 1939; G. Segré, 'Italo Balbo and the Colonization of Libya', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 7 (1972), p. 153.
68. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Iraq – Situazione politica nell'anno XVII (29 October 1938–28 October 1939)'.
69. Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, p. 173. Nevertheless, future mass-migrations to Libya were to take place quietly, without extensive press coverage, in part because of the unfavorable reactions in Tunis, Algeria and elsewhere. Segré, 'Italo Balbo and the Colonization', p. 153.
70. G. Bernardini, 'Anti-Semitism', in P. V. Cannistraro (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of Fascist Italy* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 28–30.
71. M. Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 99, 125.
72. Michaelis, *Mussolini and the Jews* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), introduction to the Hebrew edition.
73. E. Robertson, 'Race as a Factor in Mussolini's Policy in Africa and Europe', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 23, no. 1 (1988), pp. 45–7; D. Carpi, 'Fascist Italy and the Jews in the years 1922–1945' *Beshvil Hazikaron*, 19 (1997), pp. 4–5 [in Hebrew].
74. De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, English edition, p. 224.
75. Ibid., pp. 284–5, 693, 697.
76. Ciano to Italian diplomatic posts in the Middle East, 10 August 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. IX, p. 538.
77. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 32, f. 4 'Razzismo e mondo arabo'. Aponte had travelled in Muslim countries and was the author of the book: *La vita segreta dell'Arabia Felice* (Milano: Mondadori, 1936).
78. The Arab press in Palestine often criticized the Nazi regime for accelerating Jewish immigration to Palestine. Kabha, 'My Enemy's Enemy – a Friend',

p. 85; F. R. Nicosia, 'Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933–1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12, no. 3 (1980), pp. 353, 358–9.

79. Ciano to Sillitti, 9 December 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. X, pp. 563–6.
80. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, p. 205; H. Hillel, *Israël in Cairo: A Zionist Newspaper in Nationalist Egypt 1920–1939* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), p. 114 [in Hebrew].
81. M. Petricioli, 'Italian Schools in Egypt', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24, no. 2 (1997), pp. 189–90. The Italian Jews numbered 4949 according to the Egyptian census of 1927. They constituted approximately 10 per cent of the total Italian community. Criticism of Italian racial laws can be found, for example, in the November and December issues of *al-Majala al-Jadida*. I am very grateful to Professor Israel Gershoni for sharing this information with me.
82. *Palestine Post*, 25 August 1938, p. 3.
83. Shemesh, '*Filastin*'s Position', p. 268.
84. 11 April 1939, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, pp. 217–18. In March 1940 pro-Italian Muslims were still lobbying for a mosque to be built in the eternal city. Abdul Vahab Bey, 'Una Moschea a Roma', *Politica Nuova*, 8, no. 6 (March 1940), pp. 185–6.
85. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, p. 223.
86. TNA, GFM 36/17, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, 'Propaganda araba antitaliana, 1938–1941'; Khaled, *Documents secrets du 2eme bureau*, pp. 514–17.
87. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Siria e Libano – Situazione politica nell'anno XVII'; Kabha, *Journalism in the Eye of the Storm*, p. 236; I. Gershoni, 'Imprisoners and Murderers: Tawfiq al-Hakim against Mussolini and Hitler, 1938–1945', *Zmanim*, 67 (1999), p. 74 [in Hebrew].
88. Unsigned memorandum, 16 April 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. VI, p. 262.
89. Shemesh, '*Filastin*'s Position', p. 265.
90. Ciano to Jeddah and Sana'a, 17 April 1938; Ciano to Kabul, Algiers, Beirut, Jerusalem, Rabat, Tangiers, Tunis, Aleppo, Casablanca, Damascus and Tetuan, 19 April 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. VIII, pp. 586–7; 593–4.
91. ASMAE, AP, Etiopia – Fondo di Guerra, b. 166, f. 6, Castellani to Foreign Ministry, 3 May 1938; f. 5, President of the Wafd in Alexandria to Foreign Ministry, 25 May 1938; f. 2, Mazzolini to Foreign Ministry, 21 April 1938. Mazzolini's report was read by Mussolini.
92. Pizzigallo, *La diplomazia dell'amicizia*, pp. 103–7.
93. Grobba to Foreign Ministry, 18 February 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. V, pp. 800–10.
94. According to Wolffsohn, 'he [Ibn Saud] aimed at taming the Italians by wooing their most powerful ally'. Wolffsohn, 'The German-Saudi Arabian Arms Deal', p. 290. For more on Nazi Germany's policy vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia see Nicosia, 'Fritz Grobba and the Middle East', p. 217.
95. Alegi, *Ali sul deserto*, pp. 70–5.
96. Memorandum by Head of Political Division VII, 22 May 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. VI, pp. 555–6.
97. A. Hillgruber, 'The Third Reich and the Near and Middle East, 1933–39', in U. Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East 1919–1939* (Tel Aviv:

Dayan Center, 1988), p. 280; Memoranda by Head of Political Division VII, 20 June 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. VI, pp. 685–6, 743–4.

98. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 27, f. 5 'Armi', 'Contratto di fornitura bellica al governo della Saudia', 31 August 1939. The rifles and muskets supplied by Italy were both new and used. More than 50 per cent of these firearms were manufactured in Italy and the rest were made in Belgium. It is possible that the latter were part of the arms that Italy had once set aside for the Mufti of Jerusalem.
99. ASMAE, AP, Arabia, b. 27, f. 5, SANE to Foreign Ministry, 24 October 1939; Sillitti to Foreign Ministry, 27 March 1942.
100. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 18, f. 2, Ciano to Director General of Commerce, 8 March 1938.
101. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 12, f. 2 'Fornitura di armi allo Yemen'; f. 11 'S.A.N.E.'; Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 387; AUSSME, H3, Racc. 26, f. 2 'Missione militare nello Yemen'.
102. French merchants had bought the peninsula in 1868 and in 1870 the Ottomans recognized it as a French possession. After the First World War the Yemenis took control of the area, though the French maintained their claim. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 10, f. 6, 'Questione di Scek Said', 20 March 1936.
103. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 18, f. 'Fornitura di armi allo Yemen in relazione alla questione Sceik Said'; AUSSME, H3, Racc. 26, f. 2 'Missione militare nello Yemen'; f. 3, War Ministry Cabinet to SIM, 30 June 1939.
104. ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 16, f. 'Fornitura di 4 autovetture FIAT tipo Ardita Coloniale al Governo Yemenita'.
105. Sillitti to Ciano, 30 September 1938; Sillitti to Ciano, 2 October 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. X, pp. 179, 194–9.
106. Ciano to Sillitti, 9 December 1938, *DDI*, 8, vol. X, pp. 563–6.
107. ASMAE, Gab. 744; note for Ciano, 20 October 1938; f. 'Raccolta fondi in A.O.I. a favore di palestinesi'.
108. ASMAE, Gab. 744, note for Ciano, 13 March 1939. This document was read by both Mussolini and Ciano, neither of whom made any minutes or gave written instructions.
109. Martin Thomas has shown that, in the interwar period, the main threat to the stability of the French Empire and mandates came from internal nationalist movements rather than from external European influences. M. Thomas, 'Colonial States as Intelligence States: Security Policing and the Limits of Colonial Rule in France's Muslim Territories, 1920–40', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28, no. 6 (2005), pp. 1033–60.
110. HNA, Foreign Ministry Archive, K 100, N.671/443, 'Conversation with the Duce on 10 September, 1938'; unsigned memorandum, 16 April 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. VI, p. 262.
111. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, p. 324; Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 63–4.
112. ASMAE, AP, Siria, b. 21, note for Guarnaschelli, 14 June 1938; Pasqualini, *Gli equilibri nel Levante*, pp. 240–6, 254–5, 280, 290, 310.
113. Grange, 'La propaganda arabe de Radio Bari', pp. 71–2; TNA, GFM 36/72, Report no. 15 'Propaganda in Palestine', note by Nunè for the Minister of Popular Culture, 27 October 1938. The stations that transmitted in Arabic

included two from Cairo, two from Baghdad and one from Paris, London, Berlin-Zeesen (since April 1939), Ankara, Jerusalem, Beirut and Tunis.

114. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 54, note by Nunè, 28 December 1938. See also: note by Nunè for the Head of Division II, 23 December 1938.
115. ACS, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Archivio Segreto 1906–44, b. 23, f. 13, sf. 1.2 'Propaganda araba antitaliana', Ministry for Italian Africa to Tripoli, 10 March 1939; Foreign Ministry to Ministry for Italian Africa, London, Paris, Baghdad, Jeddah, Jerusalem, Beirut, Aleppo, Damascus and Sana'a, 20 April 1939.
116. Thomas, *The French Empire between the Wars*, p. 327; Khaled, *Documents secrets du 2eme bureau*, pp. 514–17.
117. Shemesh, '*Filastin*'s Position', p. 265.
118. Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad*, p. 157.
119. Shemesh, '*Filastin*'s Position', pp. 270–1.
120. Tedeschini Lalli, 'La politica italiana in Egitto', p. 1187. Following the Munich Agreement Husayn sent Mussolini a flattering telegram of congratulation. *Oriente Moderno*, XVIII (October 1938), p. 566.
121. R. Cantalupo, *Fuad, Primo re d'Egitto* (Milano: Garzanti, 1940), pp. 56–74; A. Sammarco, *Gli italiani in Egitto. Il contributo italiano nella formazione dell'Egitto moderno* (Alessandria: Edizioni del Fascio, 1937), p. 82; Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, pp. 210, 229, 242, 254–5 and 260; TNA, FO 371/23304, Telegram from Lampson, 2 January 1939.
122. TNA, GFM 36/20, Mazzolini (Cairo) to Foreign Ministry, 14 October 1939. In May 1941 al-Misri tried to flee Egypt, possibly in order to join the Axis in Libya. However, his plane crashed not far from Cairo and he was soon arrested. Kelly, *The Hunt for Zerzura*, pp. 169–71.
123. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, p. 270; Mazzolini to Ciano, 14 May 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. IV, pp. 346–7; C. D. Smith, '4 February 1942: Its Causes and Its Influence on Egyptian Politics and on the Future of Anglo-Egyptian Relations, 1937–1945', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10, no. 4. (1979), pp. 460–1; Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt*, pp. 175–9.
124. TNA, GFM 36/17, Italian Foreign Ministry to London, Paris, Jeddah, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Sana'a and Aleppo, 13 April 1939.
125. ACS, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Archivio Segreto 1906–44, b. 23, f. 13, sf. 'Propaganda araba antitaliana', note by Moreno, 1 April 1939; Foreign Ministry to Ministry for Italian Africa, 5 June 1939; Gershoni, 'Imprisoners and Murderers', p. 64.
126. Shemesh, '*Filastin*'s Position', pp. 276–7.
127. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, p. 234; Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Iraq – Situazione politica nell'anno XVII'; 'Direzione Generale Affari Generali – Ufficio Storico Diplomatico: Siria e Libano – Situazione politica nell'anno XVII'.
128. Unsigned memorandum, 16 April 1939, *DGFP*, series D, vol. VI, p. 262.
129. De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, pp. 38–40.
130. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, p. 39; Michaelis, 'Italy's Mediterranean Strategy', pp. 55–6; Strang, *On the Fiery March*, pp. 213–14.
131. TNA, GFM 36/5, 'Relazione per il Gran Consiglio', 4 February 1939.
132. Sullivan, 'The Path Marked Out', pp. 117–24; 27–8 May and 14 June 1939, Ciano, *Diary 1937–1943*, pp. 236–7, 243.

6 The Optimistic Summer, June–October 1940

1. B. Mussolini and G. Forzano, *Napoleon: The Hundred Days*, adapted to English by J. Drinkwater (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1932), p. 39.
2. 30 September 1940, Ciano, *Diaries 1937–1943*, p. 386.
3. De Felice, *Mussolini il duce, vol. II*, p. 842.
4. De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, p. 21.
5. 25 February 1940, 2 April 1940, Ciano, *Diaries 1937–1943*, pp. 323, 337–8.
6. 21 May 1940, Ciano, *Diaries 1937–1943*, p. 354.
7. 25 May 1940, G. Bottai, *Diario 1935–1944* (Milano: RCS, 2001), pp. 191–2.
8. 27–8 May 1940, Ciano, *Diaries 1937–1943*, p. 356. Ciano was probably referring to the Easter Accords wherein the British government recognized Italian presence on a few islands in the Red Sea.
9. Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 517.
10. 28 May 1940, Ciano, *Diaries 1937–1943*, p. 356.
11. Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War*, p. 22.
12. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, p. 128.
13. Ciano to Mussolini, 18 June 1940; Ciano to Mussolini, 19 June 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, pp. 35–6, 50–2. For differing interpretations of the reduction in Mussolini's armistice terms see Alfieri, *Dictators Face to Face*, p. 58; Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy*, p. 285–6; I. Kershaw, *Hitler: Nemesis, 1936–1945* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 298; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 131–3; D. Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 25–7; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, pp. 222–3.
14. 18–19 June 1940, Ciano, *Diaries 1937–1943*, p. 363.
15. Ciano to Pietromarchi, 26 June 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, p. 105.
16. L. Simoni [pseudoname of Michele Lanza], *Berlino, Ambasciata d'Italia* (Roma: Migliaresi, 1946), p. 142; P. Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter* (London: Heinemann, 1951), pp. 184–5.
17. Ciano to Mussolini, 7 July 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, pp. 186–90. Ciano promised that he would 'treat the question in detail with Ribbentrop in the following days', but there is no evidence that he actually did.
18. 16 August 1940, Bottai, *Diario*, pp. 215. Bottai lists Cyprus as one of the countries which were to come under direct Italian domination. According to the list translated by Lanza, Cyprus was to go to Greece in return for Corfu and the coastal region of Chamería (*Ciamuria*) on the Greek-Albanian border. Bottai also lists Iraq among the independent countries tied to Italy through an exclusive treaty of alliance. He was told by Ciano that Hitler only made one reservation – he would not promise Mosul in Northern Iraq, since the Germans were in need of oil.
19. Memorandum by an Official of the Foreign Ministry Secretariat, 8 July 1940, *DGFP*, series D, vol. X, pp. 147–55.
20. Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, pp. 184–85; R. Moseley, *Mussolini's Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 109; Guerri, *Galeazzo Ciano*, p. 482.
21. G. Bastianini, *Uomini, cose, fatti* (Milano: Vitagliano, 1959), p. 257.
22. Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 226.
23. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, p. 283. I have not been able to find the plan for Egypt prepared by Mazzolini. The plans that were prepared for

neighbouring countries suggest that the Foreign Ministry did not intend for Egypt to come under direct Italian domination.

24. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Ministero dell'Africa Italiana: Relazioni, pro-memoria e monografie per la Commissione interministeriale di studio per i trattati di pace – Organizzazione politico amministrativa del Sudan', August 1940; Pirelli, *Taccuini*, pp. 277–8.
25. Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Ministero dell'Africa Italiana: Relazioni, pro-memoria e monografie per la Commissione interministeriale di studio per i trattati di pace – Il nuovo regime giuridico-politico della zona del Canale di Suez; La penisola Sinai', August 1940.
26. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, p. 284.
27. Pirelli, *Taccuini*, pp. 277–8.
28. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 5 'La suddivisione del territorio africano in zone d'influenza', pp. 9–12.
29. P. D'Agostino Orsini, 'l'Egitto', *Geopolitica*, 2, n. 10 (1940), pp. 434–41.
30. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 5 'La suddivisione del territorio africano in zone d'influenza', no date [before mid-September 1940]. The Ministry for Italian Africa also prepared a detailed plan for an Italian takeover of Tunisia: Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Ministero dell'Africa Italiana: Relazioni, pro-memoria e monografie per la Commissione interministeriale di studio per i trattati di pace – Pro-memoria sul futuro assetto politico territoriale della Tunisia', August 1940.
31. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 30, 'Palestina e Transgiordania: cenni storici – periodo mandatorio – possibile assetto futuro', August 1940.
32. The House of Savoy claimed this title since the fifteenth century, as heirs of the royal family of Cyprus.
33. As mentioned above in Chapter 1, the Italian Foreign Ministry had an old tendency to look upon Sephardic Jews across the Mediterranean as potential allies. Many Sephardim in Egypt, Greece and Turkey held Italian citizenship and were considered to be important players in their countries' economies. At one stage the ministry considered developing Italian ties with Sephardic Jews to counterbalance the supposedly Zionist and pro-British Ashkenazi Jews. See Minerbi, 'Italian Diplomatic Activity', pp. 61–85 [in Hebrew].
34. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 70, f. 2 'Sotto commissione per lo studio delle questioni territoriali', 'Sistemazione Paesi arabi', 6 September 1940.
35. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 6, 'Il riassetto dei territori della peninsula siro-arabica in relazione agli interessi dell'Italia imperiale', September 1940.
36. Cohen, *Saving the Holy Sepulchre*, p. 75.
37. Cited in: 'Italy covets Palestine', *Haaretz*, 28 August 1940, p. 1.
38. E. Anchieri, 'Palestina: passato e avvenire', *Geopolitica*, 2, n. 12 (1940), pp. 556–9.
39. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 70, f. 2 'Sotto Commissione per lo studio delle questioni territoriali', 'Notizie storico-politiche', prepared by the *Istituto per l'Oriente*, August 1940; plan prepared by Ugo Theodoli, October 1940; and report submitted by the *Banco di Roma – Direzione Centrale*, July 1940.
40. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 70, f. 2, 'Cipro', 15 October 1940.
41. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 6, 'Il riassetto dei territori della peninsula siro-arabica in relazione agli interessi dell'Italia imperiale', September 1940.

42. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 70, f. 2 'Sotto commissione per lo studio delle questioni territoriali', 'Sistemazione Paesi arabi', 6 September 1940.
43. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 6, 'Il riassetto dei territori della peninsula siro-arabica in relazione agli interessi dell'Italia imperiale', September 1940.
44. Guarnaschelli to Ciano, 10 September 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, pp. 566–7.
45. The existence of such a plan is mentioned in this ministry's plan for Sinai. See Personal Archive of Rodolfo Goglia, 'Ministero dell'Africa Italiana: Relazioni, pro-memoria e monografie per la Commissione interministeriale di studio per i trattati di pace – Il nuovo regime giuridico-politico della zona del Canale di Suez; La penisola Sinai', August 1940, p. 7.
46. The Slavic threat, which is mentioned a number of times throughout the plan, refers to Soviet ambitions in the region. It is not entirely clear who exactly the planners had in mind when referring to the 'Asiatic' threat (possibly Japan).
47. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 6, 'Il riassetto dei territori della peninsula siro-arabica in relazione agli interessi dell'Italia imperiale', September 1940.
48. AUSSME, L10, Racc. 91, sf. 5 'La suddivisione del territorio africano in zone d'influenza', p. 7.
49. G. Bottai, *Diario 1935–1944*, G. B. Guerri (ed.) (Milano: RCS, 2001), p. 220.
50. ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 73, f. 4 'Propaganda araba da Radio Bari', 'Giornale radio arabo', 29 June and 17 July 1940.
51. ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, b. 63, Egitto, f. 'Propaganda tra gli arabi dell'Egitto'. Pamphlets in Arabic and English were dropped on Mersa Matruh as early as 18 June. See TNA, WO 106/2071, Air Ministry to HQs in Iraq, Aden, Malta, Nairobi and Khartoum, 20 June 1940.
52. G. Warner, *Iraq and Syria 1941* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1974), pp. 36–7; Ciano to Petrucci (Teheran), 28 June 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, p. 117. After Italy joined the war, all communication between Rome and Baghdad was conducted via Italy's embassy in Iran. This caused considerable delay in the arrival of messages.
53. Papen to Foreign Ministry, 6 July 1940, *DGFP*, series D, vol. X, pp. 141–43; De Peppo to Ciano, 10 July 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, p. 201; De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, p. 46. The Iraqi Minister brought with him a letter from the Mufti which Papen passed on to his Italian counterpart in Turkey, De Peppo.
54. Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p. 54.
55. Memorandum by the Director of the Political Department, 21 July 1940; Circular of the Foreign Ministry, 20 August 1940, *DGFP*, series D, vol. X, pp. 261–2, 515–16.
56. Petrucci to Ciano, 16 August 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, pp. 405–6.
57. Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, pp. 49–50. Under the terms of the Franco-Italian armistice, French military equipment in Syria was placed under the control of an Italian commission.
58. ASMAE, AP, Palestina, b. 30, 'Palestina e Transgiordania: cenni storici – periodo mandatorio – possibile assetto futuro', August 1940, p. 62.
59. Guarnaschelli to Ciano, 5 September 1940; Guarnaschelli to Ciano, 10 September 1940, *DDI*, 9, vol. V, pp. 543–4, 566–7.
60. Mackensen to German Foreign Ministry, 10 September 1940; Mackensen to German Foreign Ministry, 14 September 1940, *DGFP*, series D, vol. XI, pp. 48–9, 75–6; De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, p. 48.

61. Warner, *Iraq and Syria*, p. 56.
62. J. Strawson, *The Battle for North Africa* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2004), pp. 20–2.
63. AUSSME, I4, Racc. 9, f. 11 'Comunicati operativi', Badoglio to Balbo, 28 June 1940.
64. J. S. Corum, 'The *Luftwaffe* and its allied air forces in World War II', *Air Power History*, 51, no. 2 (2004), p. 10; TNA, WO 106/2071, C. in C. Middle East to War Office, 22 August 1940; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 129–36,156–7.
65. ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, 'Carteggio Riservato – Bollettini e informazioni', bb. 215, 216 and 218; *Palestine Post*, 16 and 25 July 1940; ASMAE, AP, Italia, b. 73, f. 4 'Propaganda araba da Radio Bari', 'Giornale radio arabo', 17 July 1940.
66. AUSAM, EG 2, f. 14 'Relazioni Egeo', De Vecchi to Air Force Chief of Staff, 28 August 1940; I. S. O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, vol. I (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1954), p. 164.
67. ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, 'Carteggio Riservato – Bollettini e informazioni', b. 216; Frank Edwards, *The Gaysh: A History of the Aden Protectorate Levies 1927–61 and the Federal Regular Army of South Arabia 1961–67* (Solihull: Helion, 2004), pp. 65–7; C. Shores, *Dust clouds in the Middle East: The Air War for East Africa, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Madagascar, 1940–42* (London: Grub Street, 1996), pp. 17–23; Playfair, *The Mediterranean*, vol. I, p. 164.
68. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 150–5; Shores, *Dust clouds in the Middle East*, p. 32.
69. ACS, Ministero dell'Africa Italiana, Archivio Segreto 1906–44, b. 20, f. 10, sf. 1, Teruzzi to Foreign Ministry, 19 June 1940; Foreign Ministry to Ministry for Italian Africa, 24 June 1940; ASMAE, AP, Yemen, b. 18, f. 1, Teruzzi to Addis Ababa, 6 July 1940; unsigned note, 22 August 1940.
70. Rossi, *La vita e i diari di Serafino Mazzolini*, pp. 287–94; ACS, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, Reports, b. 5, Report no. 38: 'Fascist propaganda in Egypt. Comm. Ugo Dadone'.
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72. 30 July 1940, F. Halder, *The Halder War Diary 1939–1942* (London: Greenhill Books, 1988), p. 240.
73. Kershaw, *Hitler: Nemesis, 1936–1945*, pp. 306, 326.
74. K. Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (London: Bastford, 1973), p. 103; Kershaw, *Hitler: Nemesis*, pp. 327–31; A. Santoni and F. Mattesini, *La partecipazione tedesca all guerra aeronavale nel Mediterraneo* (Roma: Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1980), pp. 26–7; Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, *Germany and the Second World War*, vol. III, pp. 185, 200, 210, 217, 224.
75. A. Hitler, *The Testament of Adolf Hitler* (London: Cassell, 1959), pp. 70–1.
76. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, *Germany and the Second World War*, vol. III, p. 270; AUSSME, I4, Racc. 9, f. 11 'Comunicati operativi', Badoglio to Graziani, 29 August 1940.
77. TNA, WO 106/2072, 'Rome in English for North [Africa] and Middle East', 19 September 1940.
78. ACS, Segreteria Particolare del Duce, 'Carteggio Riservato – Bollettini e informazioni', b. 220, De Vecchi to Badoglio, 21 September 1940.

79. TNA, WO 208/3082, Telegram no. 878 from High Commissioner, 10 September 1940; T. Goren, 'Jewish Money for Arabs in Need', *Et-Mol*, 184 (2005), pp. 28–9 [in Hebrew].
80. P. Moci, *Seguendo la bandiera* (Milano: Giorgio Apostolo, 2001), pp. 113–23.
81. TNA, WO 106/2072, broadcast in Italian on Graziani's report to Mussolini, 23 December 1940; captured war diary of Second Lieutenant Federico Gorio, entry of 10 December 1940.
82. Duggan, *The Force of Destiny*, p. xix.
83. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, p. 1.
84. B. R. Sullivan, 'The Italian Armed Forces, 1918–40', in A. R. Millett and W. Murray (eds), *Military Effectiveness, vol. II: The Interwar Period* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988), p. 181.
85. De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, p. 40.
86. After the defeat of the anti-British forces in Iraq in May 1941, the Mufti and Rashid Ali escaped from Baghdad, eventually finding refuge in Italy and Germany. For details on their negotiations with the Axis regarding a proclamation promising Arab independence, see D. Carpi, 'The Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, and his Diplomatic Activity during World War II (October 1941–July 1943)', *Zionism*, IX (1984), pp. 285–316 [in Hebrew]; Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, pp. 101–4; De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente*, pp. 86–114.

Conclusions

1. A term used by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to describe the way people adapt their moves to a number of possible situations. P. Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 9–12.
2. See, for example, Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, pp. 65–103; I. Pappe, *Aristocracy of the Land: The Husayni Family* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2002), p. 307 [in Hebrew].
3. Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, p. 286; Salerno, *Vital Crossroads*, pp. 7–8.
4. Nicosia, 'Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany', p. 366.
5. Mallett, *The Italian Navy*, p. 60; Sullivan, 'The Italian Armed Forces', p. 172; Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, p. 626.
6. See, for instance, B. Sullivan, 'The Impatient Cat: Assessments of Military Power in Fascist Italy, 1936–1940', in W. Murray and A. R. Millett (eds), *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II* (New York: the Free Press, 1992), pp. 108–18; Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, pp. 54–58; Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals*, 508–16.
7. François-Poncet to Bonnet, 14 April 1939, *DDF*, 2, vol. XV, p. 639.
8. C. Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 367.
9. Bosworth, 'War, Totalitarianism and "Deep Belief"', pp. 489–92; Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, p. 219; M. Clark, *Modern Italy 1871–1982* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 290–1.
10. C. G. Segrè, 'Liberal and Fascist Italy in the Middle East, 1919–1939: The Elusive White Stallion', in U. Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919–1939* (New York and London, Holmes and Meier, 1988), p. 210.

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